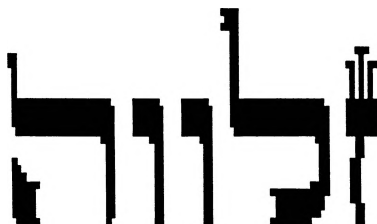
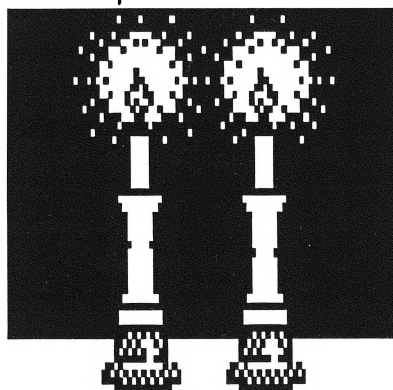


ספר זכרון



ZELVA MEMORIAL BOOK

Edited by
YERACHMIEL MOORSTEIN
ירחמיאל מורשטיין



Publication Committee
Yitzhak Shalev, Dora Geiger, Yehoshua Freidin
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JACOB SOLOMON BERGER
יעקב שלמה ברגר

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1992

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First Edition

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*Published in the United States
by Jacob Solomon Berger
Mahwah, New Jersey*

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To my Children,

Sharon Ann

חנה רבקה

Daniel Andrew

דניאל אברהם

David Allen

דוד אריה

Judyth Ellen

יהודית עלקה

Rachel Eryn

רחל אירית

Robert Ian

רנחום יצחק

With the hope that they will read this book, and come to understand the proud people from whom they stem and the noble tradition to which they are heirs. For truly, they are my most important legacy.

Supporters Honor Roll

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

Bruce & Judy Brickman

Harold & Pearl Freed

Joshua & Harriet Freed

Alan & Connie Fried

Dr. Murray Frum

Andrea Kasen Grunberger

Sam & Sylvia Krugman

Dr. Jacob & Beatrice Melnick

Jack & Fran Rubin

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ZELVA

זֶלְבָּה

FORWARD

Translator's Note

by Jacob Solomon Berger

The task of translating the *Zelva Memorial Book* into English is another milestone in a continuing commitment that I have to the preservation of the history of my family. This commitment has its roots in the unique circumstances of my upbringing. I had the privilege of being raised in a four-generation household, which afforded me a very special opportunity to see a "genealogical pyramid" from a fairly elevated perspective. My grandparents were immigrants to the United States who came from Zelva. Because of their commitment to faith and culture, I acquired a facility with Yiddish and Hebrew commensurate with that of my native English. It was only many years later that I understood this to be an increasing rarity among native-born Americans, and as such, it jeopardized the preservation of our family folklore. The immeasurable loss caused by the Holocaust served to underscore this issue in my mind.

I was first moved to action in 1976, after making my first trip to Israel. As a result of meeting my Freidin family relatives, I discovered that our family relationships were not well understood. Indeed, the limited knowledge that existed among the older members of the family showed signs of dissipating. With encouragement from my cousin Moshe Freidin, I undertook the task of developing a chronicle of the Freidin family genealogy. An abstract of that genealogy is included in this volume.

I have continued in my capacity as Chronicler for the Freidins of Zelva, and their many descendants around the world. I became very interested in the *Zelva Memorial Book* project for very obvious reasons, and read the original 1984 publication with great interest. I concluded that I shared a fundamental obligation with the original editor, as expressed in his following note on the subject of the Yiddish language. Yerachmiel Moorstein recognizes that for a testament to have value and impact, it must be rendered accessible to its intended audience. Recognizing that Yiddish has seriously diminished in its role as the *lingua franca* of world Jewry, he translated all of the contributions to this volume into Hebrew, so that future generations of Israelis could read about the life and times of their forbears in Eastern Europe. This step was necessary, but not sufficient.

There are several hundred of our kinfolk in North America, the United Kingdom and Australia, whose future generations may not have the facility in Hebrew that would make the original work accessible to them. They too will have a need to remember, and to know from whence they came. It is for them that I decided to translate this work into English. I am somewhat amused to know that some of the passages have made the voyage from English to Hebrew, and now back to English again!

I share Yerachmiel Moorstein's outlook in approaching the task of translation. I have tried to stick to as literal a translation as I could, to convey the flavor of the authors' writings. This is a very interesting challenge. For those of you who are interested in some of the considerations, I warmly recommend the Introduction to *A Treasury of Yiddish Stories*, edited by Irving Howe and Eliezer Greenberg, Penguin Press, (see especially pp. 46-50).

Hebrew is, of course, a Semitic language, while English is Anglo-Saxon. Hebrew is very spare in its inventory of words and roots, while English ranks as one of the most malleable and rich languages, insofar as the range of choice a writer has, to express different nuances of meaning. By contrast,

Hebrew often relies on Biblical metaphor and allegory, where the proper choice of a single word or phrase can telegraph a page of meaning. It is not always possible to carry this resonance of meaning across the language barrier. That is why you will see the *italic print* being used in more than one way. I use italic to set off words in Hebrew and Yiddish that are probably best left untranslated. Words such as *Heder*, *Mincha*, *Maariv*, and *Tarbut* can be related to quickly enough, and their untranslated flavor in the English text is welcome.

In addition, however, you will see italics used where its need is less obvious. For example, in his introduction, Yerachmiel Moorstein uses an allegorical reference to the Nazis, when he invokes the image of an *Abrogator*. In part, this is a literary device used to refer to a despised and hated entity only by the most indirect of means. Also, in his use of the Hebrew *koret*, he conjures the image of the biblical punishment of a shortened life span, coloring his description with the specter of retribution.

Sometimes the task of conveying the original text is too formidable for simple italics. Eliezer Futritzky wrote in his diary, that on his last night in Zelva, he was in the back yard of his home. In an impulse of desire to keep the night from running out, he looks up at the moon and asks it to stop in the sky so that the night will last longer. Only a reader of the original text will see that he borrowed the exact usage from the Bible, where Joshua commanded the sun to stand still in Gibeon during his battle with the Canaanites. The resonance that comes with such usage simply will not cross the language barrier.

Here and there, the reader will also see that I have left a smattering of Hebrew text, and even some Russian, where I felt it might be appropriate. For the facility to do this, I am indebted to my computer, and the very comprehensive facilities available in the WordPerfect word processing software package. As good as it is, I must say that it lacks the warmth, grace, charm, and wit of my cousin Chaya Freidin, who typed the original tri-lingual manuscript in Israel.

I am indebted to my cousin, Chaim Jonah Gilony, and his uncle, Dr. Nahum Gelman, both of Jerusalem, who gave of their time to review this manuscript and assure the integrity of the English translation. Equally, I am grateful to Ephraim (Foyka) Gelman, whose ebullient conversation and input, helped me to put some of the content into its proper perspective.

I hope that readers of this English text will appreciate what they find within, and that they will come away with an enhanced appreciation for the life and times of the people who lived in Zelva. Most importantly, this must be a testament to the terrifying fate that overtook those who were left behind, and that this memory *will* be preserved for as long as our generations continue to follow in the path of our tradition.

Mahwah, New Jersey, Spring 1992

The Yiddish Language

by Yerachmiel Moorstein

With the destruction of European Jewry, the Yiddish language has practically disappeared, the very language that served as their mother tongue for all of their lives in the Diaspora, until the stirrings of Zionism began, and along with it the re-birth of the Hebrew language.

Zelva youth began the study of Hebrew, but somewhat late and less than necessary. It was only after the First World War that the *Tarbut* and *Tachkemoni* schools were established, and only few students achieved enough mastery of Hebrew to be able to express themselves in it.

The day-to-day language was, as stated, Yiddish, and they spoke it at home, and among fellow Jews, in addition to the national language - Polish. It is natural therefore, that after the years of inhuman suffering, the survivors who reached the Holy Land expressed themselves in Yiddish.

In order that the heartrending stories of the survivors be accessible to coming generations, to readers that were raised "at the knees" of the Hebrew language, I found it proper to translate them. The translation is not literal, but the content is faithful to the essence of the original source.

But in order to preserve the original language, the reader will find the full story of our friend, Samuel Yarnivsky, of blessed memory, in Yiddish, as it appeared in the Jewish newspaper, *The Forward*, in New York, and other stories from [Ephraim] *Foyka* Gelman, and Samuel Kaninovitc [These items have also been translated into English. The interested reader is referred to the original text for the Yiddish versions. - JSB].

Publication Note

After several years of investing energy, thought and work, we have before us a *Memorial Book* about - *ZELVA* - in which we integrate the sacred memory of our beloved ones who were wiped out in such an awesome and terrifying manner.

No book can hope to focus on all aspects of the variegated life of our loved ones, but it can provide a foundation that will not be disappointing to our memories about what was, and is no more.

For the effort in bringing this book to reality, we are obligated to thank our friends: *Emanuel Vishniatzky, Isser Zelikovitz, Mordechai Loshovitz, Menahem Levine, Ze'ev Nosatsky, and Sala Koyat.*

A vote of thanks and blessings to our friends in Australia: *The Slutsky brothers, Moshe and Joseph, Sandor Spector, and Herzel Borodetzky.* In Israel: *Joseph Wallstein,* and in the United States, *Ephraim Gelman* - all for their contributions.

Included in our good wishes are all our friends who wrote to us and provided pictures.

A special vote of thanks goes to *Chaya Freidin,* for her dedicated work in preparing the manuscript for this book in the three languages that it contains.

We extend our best wishes to all the natives of our town, wherever they are, with our best wishes for a Happy New Year !

Tel-Aviv, New Year's Eve, 5745

Translator's Note:

The original Hebrew edition contains a collection of photographs, a hand-drawn map of the town of Zelva, and an artistic rendition of an Eternal Light (*Ner Tamid*) created by Yitzhak Shalev (Shulyak). It has not been possible to transfer these items into this English translation. The reader interested in these items is referred to the original text.

Conveying Congratulations!

by Pinchas Levine

We have achieved the publication of a *Memorial Book* about our town, Zelva, that was obliterated from the map at the hands of the Nazi aggressors and their accomplices.

Our beloved townsfolk, who to our great consternation, did not manage to escape the *Vale of Tears*, were herded to the gas chambers of Treblinka, and were destroyed in a frightening and earth-shattering manner, and no trace of this community that existed for hundreds of years, was left behind.

We were left no choice but to perpetuate their sacred memory by publishing this *Memorial Book*, thereby documenting the circumstances of the Holocaust that overtook our townsfolk. The natives of the town who reside here in Israel, number about fifty, and not all of them, myself included, are gifted with good writing skills, and they were not able to contribute a great deal to the production of this *Memorial Book*. As a result, our friend, *Yerachmiel Moorstein* took upon himself this sacred duty, to reduce to writing the history of the city, the life led there, he translated and edited the writings of our townsfolk, and brought the production of the book to a successful conclusion. I am convinced that without him, this sacred undertaking would not have been properly realized.

With this, I convey my honest assessment, and offer my deepest thanks to our esteemed colleague, *Yerachmiel Moorstein* for this work of his, to which he dedicated himself for nearly two years, and he completed this task of memorialization - for those who will come after us, and I hereby offer him the traditional blessing:

YASH'IR KOACH !!

I find it appropriate to convey congratulations and thanks to *Yerachmiel Moorstein* for the effort he invested in the production of this book, a monument to the memory of the city Zelva, that was obliterated, and its Jewish population destroyed - and this, for future generations.

The Supporters and Fulfillers

by Yerachmiel Moorstein

This volume cannot pretend to focus on all aspects of the variegated lives of the Jews in Zelva. What is written here, is a little bit about the central essence.

Undoubtedly, there are errors in the text, and it is incomplete in its attempt to portray to coming generations, the nature of the town up to the time of its destruction.

To those who were born in the town, this book will not disappoint them, as source of unforgettable experiences, about memories and stories of what once was and is no more.

From the day they arrived in this Land, the people of our town worked hard, each one in his own field, without consideration of how many hours they would work in a day. They felt that they were turning a vision into a reality. We will not forget their place because of their dedication to the glory of Israel.

The sons of Zelva were among the founders of *Kibbutzim*: *Efek*, *Giveat-HaSheloshah*, *Giveat-Chaim*, *Noan* and *Ramat HaShofet*.

In the ranks of the Haganah:

The watchman, *Mordechai Zlotnitsky* - killed on the way to the Dead Sea.

The soldier, *Zvi Merrill*, the son of Aharon, from *Giveat-HaSheloshah* - killed in the line of duty.

The watchman, *Pesach Rafilovitz* - wounded in the Haifa riots of 1936-39.

The *Palmach* soldier - *Zvi Ben-Zvi*, son of Rachel Barkleid, wounded in the service and disabled in both legs. He overcame this and returned to function; participates a great deal in sport events and represents the Israeli handicapped in International Olympic events.

Eliezer Vishnitsky - son of Emanuel, an officer in the Yom Kippur War at a critical outpost. He was at a lookout post at the edge of the Suez Canal together with four of his comrades, and they held the post for four consecutive days, and it was only after Eliezer was wounded and lost his memory, that they gave up and were captured by the Egyptians. He received medical care in an Egyptian hospital.

Yitzhak Shalev - A defense department officer, and head of the technical section, who invented and perfected devices that became standards within the Israeli Defense Force, and received commendations from the defense department. This item is taken from the newspaper, *BaMahaneh* of 24 March 1977.

In Medicine:

My daughter, *Dr. Nitzza Gurtz-Moorstein*, an eye doctor, and her husband, *Dr. Ernst Raphael* a surgeon, who were among the first volunteers who came to Israel during the Six Day War, and did a great deal for the country.

In Music:

Shlomo Mintz, the son of a townsman of ours, Abraham, of blessed memory, he is the acclaimed world class violinist, who began his career in Israel as a child prodigy, and today, at age 29, has obtained rave reviews. He appears as a soloist with the most famous philharmonic orchestras of the world, including the Israeli Philharmonic Orchestra.

After the Second World War, when the refugees of the conflict from our town reached the Holy Land, the first Committee of Zelva Immigrants in Israel was set up, and its purpose was to provide aid and support to the people of the town. The founders of the Committee and its members were: **Moshe Geiger** (of blessed memory), **Yitzhak Freidin** (of blessed memory), **Yitzhak Shalev**, **Menahem Levine**, and your loyal servant, **Yerachmiel Moorstein**.

In the effort to produce this book, the following took and active part: **Dora Geiger**, continuing in her [late] husband's (**Moshe Geiger**) position, even though he himself was not from Zelva, **Yehoshua Freidin**, continuing in the tradition of his father, **Yitzhak Freidin**, **Yitzhak Shalev**, and myself.

Our Australian townsfolk:[Inputs from] **Sandor Spector**, **Herzel Borodetzky**, **Moshe and Joseph Slutsky**, and their sister **Beracha**, were provided by **Sala Koyat**.

Most of the townsfolk responded to our request, and participated in the publication of this book, some in substance, and others in spirit.

I permit myself in the name of the Organization of Zelva Immigrants in Israel to acknowledge the work, and thank the following of our friends: **Sala Koyat**, **Mordechai Loshovitz**, **Menahem Levine**, **Ze'ev Nosatsky**, **Isser Zelikovitz** and **Emanuel Vishnitzky**.

Despite delays, and notwithstanding the extended period of time that it took to prepare, here we have in front of us, **The Zelva Memorial Book**, a product of dedicated effort, produced amid doubts and worry, and [even] deficiencies in research and material. There were those who believed that this **Memorial Book** would never see the light of day. "We have no material," they argued, "at most, we may be able to put some sort of a notebook together." The publication of this book was done out of a desire to create a monument to our martyrs, who were annihilated - not because of any wrongdoing wrought by their own hands - but just because they were Jews.

I permit myself, in the name of all the members of the organization, to thank the members who helped with the assembly of the material and the finances, and especially to **Yitzhak Shalev** and **Dora Geiger**, and to the rest of the Committee: **Mordechai Loshovitz**, **Sala Koyat**, **Menahem Levine** and **Ze'ev Nosatsky**.

REMEMBER, AND DO NOT FORGET WHAT THE NAZIS DID !!!

INTRODUCTION

by Yerachmiel Moorstein

During the Second World War, (1939 - 1945) *The Abrogator* descended on the Jews of Europe. Six million lives were destroyed in the most terrifying Holocaust of our history, perpetrated at the hands of the Nazi beasts of prey and their allies, who subjected their victims to torture and transported them to gas chambers and crematoria in extermination camps.

The Holocaust did not pass over our town of Zelva. Our dear ones, fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters, with children in their arms, were taken like sheep to the slaughter, to Treblinka. There, they were suffocated, and burned because their one sin was that they were Jews, and no trace remains of this Jewish community today. In this town, located in Byelorussia, (White Russia) which was captured by Poland in the First World War, our fathers and forefathers lived for hundreds of years.

Our youth today in the Holy Land is not sensitive to the role of Diaspora Judaism from which we came. The concept of the Diaspora to our young people, conjures an image of the persecuted Jew who is weak, and lacking any initiatives requiring strength, a Jew who fears all gentiles, and seeks to alter events by reading the Psalms, and who closets himself away from danger, and hopes for the coming of the Messiah. It is our duty to convey to coming generations, that this Diaspora Judaism spawned proud warriors who knew how to take the battle to the enemy in trying times and under the most difficult circumstances.

Behold, I am one of the survivors from Zelva, a member of its last generation whose roots run deep in the soil which is damp with martyr's blood, one of the last witnesses of the life that went on there until its earth-shattering eradication from the map of Jewish life. The memory of our martyrs gave me no surcease in these last years, and I decided that I will not be able to rest, or be still, until I was able to preserve their memory, and together with other people from the town, we decided to approach the creation of this book, and to preserve in it what was known to us, for the sake of future generations. Our efforts have been fruitful, and we are in the midst of implementation.

We do not have official appointees, nor a community portfolio to describe the variegated life of the Jews who entered all aspects of economic and cultural life through work and art. We are witnesses that all those who left this town were -- and still are -- pioneers: kibbutzniks, reclaimers of the desert, workers on building the Holy Land and its security, and wise and educated people who contribute importantly to all walks of life.

I was born at the beginning of the twentieth century, and on the strength of personal memories alone, I present in this *Memorial Book*, with trepidation and a sacred sense, and with no small concern, what is known to me of life in Zelva in this period up to its destruction.

Community life in Zelva was not solely based on commercial considerations. Everything was done with a charitable sense, beginning from small groups up through organizations. Despite want, economic pressure, and the concern for food during the war years, Jews, especially the youth, organized themselves principally in Zionist groups, but also in the *Bund* as well as others.

While a social welfare office did not exist, a Jew who fell on hard times, or into difficult circumstances, received assistance from other Jews who made donations in many forms. Many were in dire straits, but no one was abandoned. Even widows and orphans who preferred hunger to a

handout, were served through anonymous charitable donations such as "*Maot Hittin*" and "*Kemhah Depaskha*". Even the donor did not know to whom his donation went. Everyone had faith in the integrity of the facilitators.

Jewish unity and identity filled life with substance and interest. When a Jew was born, all of the members of the synagogue participated in this joy. If a Jew died, all stores closed during the time of the funeral. All Israel, as the saying goes, felt responsible for one another. No occasion, happy or sad, was ignored. News flew through the town like an arrow loosed from a bow. On the Shabbat, or on a holiday, the town rested, and the stores, mostly Jewish owned, were closed. No one came or went, apparently, because of a dominant Jewish presence affecting religious and educational matters. But for those who come after us, it is important that they know there was a second side to this, with difficult encumbrances on Jews. In all aspects of life, the Jew was denied opportunity and rights. It was forbidden for a Jew to be elected as Mayor. A Jew could not even be a street cleaner. If a Jew served in the armed forces, he was denied the opportunity to achieve the rank of an officer. When Jews were finally permitted grudging entry to universities, they had to put up with harassment and embarrassments from all sides. Jews were forbidden to own land or real property, and there was no opportunity to improve one's lot in life. In the absence of industry, the future looked bleak to the young people of the town. Anti-Semitism reared its ugly head and denied any peace of mind in the life of the country.

The only conclusion, which became apparent at the beginning of the century, was to emigrate. Tens found the strength to overcome their difficulties, crossed boundaries, and succeeded eventually in reaching the United States. Among these were three of my father's brothers, and a maternal uncle. During the years of the First World War, these emigrants were a source of support to whole families with no means in a little town, which during the war years was overrun by many armies and changed hands to the detriment of its inhabitants. When the Balfour Declaration was announced, many Jews saw in that act, the beginning of the period of Messianic redemption. The yearning for Zion strengthened, and the youth who were members of *Histadrut*, and *He-Halutz* began to make preparations to go to the Holy Land.

Most of the young people of Zelva did not have the means for such an undertaking, because they came from poor families with many children. The *He-Halutz* organization created a facilitating system that found these young people manual labor in order to qualify them to emigrate to the Holy Land when the time came. However, the Mandate administration that governed the Holy Land at the time, made a very limited number of entry certificates available, and therefore, many were unable to go. A second means was to attempt illegal entry. This effort which was organized before the onset of the Second World War, also claimed precious lives, as many were lost at sea.

And so, a random handful of about fifty souls from Zelva managed, one way or another to reach the Holy Land. The British Government in Palestine refused entry to the others, and so to our great pain, our parents, brothers and sisters were sacrificed, and nothing remains except for us to preserve their precious memory. The one thing we could do in memory of our martyrs was to create this memorial which will stand for generations to come. In addition to this *Memorial Book*, we have erected a marble memorial list in memory of these martyrs in the *Holocaust Cellar* in Jerusalem, and a second list in the *Forest of Martyrs*. Also a memorial scroll for Volkovysk in the cemetery of *Nahalat-Yitzhak* contains a memorial for Zelva as well.

*MAY THEIR SOULS BE BOUND UP IN THE BOND OF LIFE,
FOR EVER AND EVER !*

In memory of the martyrs of Zelva, 22 former members of Zelva gathered on January 18, 1983 from all parts of Israel. Because of my effort, and the effective participation of Yitzhak Shalev and Dora Geiger, everyone present took on the objective to produce this Book. Donations of up to 1000 shekel were received to meet this goal. The committee was enlarged to include Menahem Levin, Mordechai Loshovitz and Sala Koyat.

THE TESTAMENT

by Yerachmiel Moorstein

To remember and not forget,
The legacy of those beloved,
Who by girding themselves with strength,
Trod their way under great tribulation.

To Treblinka - to crematoria,
Because their sole crime,
They were taken without resistance,
For being a part of the Jewish people.

On this, their last journey,
To sacrifice their unsullied souls,
Their eyes raised, seeking salvation,
But raised in vain.

In enlightened Europe, an advanced
nation, with educated people,
Are occupied with the technology
Of how to exterminate Jews.

And to these beasts of prey,
Thirsty for blood,
No one cries: *Stop!*
You are destroying a people !!!

Let the memory of the marauding Nazis
Who brought to an end
All our beloved people
Be an eternal shame and abomination

Guard this Testament
Our obligation is to conserve and pass on
To those who come after us - the next generation,
So they shall not forget, but will remember.

ZELVA

[Note: This historical excerpt was taken from an entry at the Museum of the Jewish Diaspora, and can also be found in the Jewish Encyclopedia]

Zelva (Pol. Zelwa), town in Grodno oblast, Byelorussian S.S.R. Jews were accustomed to visiting the Zelva fairs from the end of the 15th century. A Jewish community, under the jurisdiction of the Grodno *Kahal*, was established in the late 16th century. During the 18th century, Jews traded at the local fairs, dealing in horses and in furs imported from Moscow. The lay and rabbinical leaders of Lithuania met at these fairs and after 1766, when the Council of the Four Lands was disbanded, Zelva became the customary meeting place for Rabbis of the region. Excommunications against the Hasidim were publicized here in 1781 and 1796, and a plan of action was drawn up to suppress the movement. In 1766 there were 522 Jews who paid the poll tax. In 1793, Zelva was annexed by Russia. There were 846 Jews in 1847, and 1,844 (66% of the total population) in 1897. Between the world wars, Zelva was part of independent Poland, and possessed Tarbut and Yavneh schools. In 1921, the Jewish community numbered 1,319 (64%). The community was annihilated in World War II.

OVERVIEW OF THE ORIGINS OF OUR TOWN

by Yerachmiel Moorstein

Zelva is a town in the Grodno Province, Byelorussia, in the U.S.S.R. By the end of the 15th Century, Jews were already living there, who from the standpoint of community organization, belonged to the community of Grodno. By the year 1600, Jews were already established in the town. Many Jews visited the town, among them, Rabbis and Elders of the community from Lithuania. In 1766 after the establishment of the Four-Lands Commission ("*Vaad Arba Ha-aratzot*") a community was established that had to pay taxes to the commission, and 522 Jews paid this tax at that time.

In 1781, at one of the major fairs, the rabbis and leaders of the four communities gathered in Zelva. They were from the towns of: Brisk, Grodno, Pinsk, and Pluytsk. This meeting which took the place of a commission for the country of Lithuania, among other things, declared war on Hasidism. In the discussion, that included the Rabbi of Brisk, Abraham Katzenellenbogen, and the righteous teacher, Mr. Zelig, who brought a letter from Rabbi Elijah, the Vilna Gaon, the following resolution was adopted:

"We have adopted the edict of excommunication currently prevailing in Vilna, announced at the Zelva fair, and all who hear and accept it, and will reject Hasidism will not be estranged from the Lord.

Signed by the community leadership at the great Zelva fair on the 3rd day of Elul 5541."

In 1796, again during the days of the great Zelva fair, this terrible excommunication was reaffirmed. To the best of our present knowledge, this interdiction was fully observed in Zelva, and no Hasidim were known to have settled there. At the time, this part of the world belonged to Poland.

In 1793, Russia penetrated this area. At that time there were 846 tax paying Jews in the town. The Jewish population grew, so that by 1897 they numbered 1844 people, and comprised 66% of the town population. After the First World War, Poland was established again, and in 1921, the Jewish population of Zelva was 1319, representing 64% of the town population. Below is a table from the year 1897 that sets out the Jewish population in comparison to overall the total for towns in the Volkovysk valley, city and region:

<u>City</u>	<u>Total Population</u>	<u>Jewish Population</u>
Svislutz	3099	2086
Zelva	2803	1844
Piesk	2396	1615
Prozova	2082	931
Yaluvka	1311	743
Liskova	876	658
Izbalin	963	454
Amstibuba	1228	389
Novidbor	1481	183
Zalvian	600	81

The demographic overview shows that from 1847 to 1897, the population of Jews in Zelva grew by about 1000, proving that this 50-year period was a period of growth, aided in part by the creation of the Warsaw - Moscow railroad line, on which Zelva was one of the stops.

At the beginning of the 20th Century, the persecution of Jews by the Russian government increased, and in particular, as a result of the failed uprising of 1905, in which Jews from Zelva also participated. Some were imprisoned, and those that had the financial means, fled the country. Many emigrated, in particular to the United States. There, they encountered the difficulties of absorption into American life, but they believed in the ultimate improvement of their lives, and strived to bring their families to them, and not to return to Russia.

The Bialystok pogrom of 1906, abetted by the authorities, caused much Jewish blood to be spilled. The concomitant deterioration in the economic and social conditions, accelerated the rate of emigration. That is why the Jewish population in 1921 stood at only 1319, despite the high birth rate among Jews, where it was typical to find between 6 and 8 children in a household.

Three of my father's brothers, one of them a revolutionary that escaped from exile, and also one of my mother's brothers, fled during this era. Their descendants are found today among the greater Jewish population of the world.

The Place

Zelva is found on the road from Warsaw to Moscow, on the banks of the Zelvianka River that empties into the Neman River. It is a town in the Volkovysk valley, with a railroad line, and a station approximately 20km from the larger city. A principal highway went past the town on its other side. Surrounding the town were tens of hamlets, populated by Russian Slavic peasantry with a Polish minority. In a few of these, Jewish families lived for many generations, some as estate managers for the local nobility. Jews also found sustenance by working in the large forests of the area. Because of its strategic location, this area did not escape the wars that took place in the area, nor the other upheavals of the time, whose mark was seldom low-key or light-handed.

During the First World War, as the German army began to move forward and captured several fortified areas held by Russian troops, panic set in among the Russian peasant population along with a desire to cross into the heartland of Russia. Many refugees remained behind without anything, or those who abandoned their possessions. A similar fate befell countless Jews who dwelt along the extensive boundary between Russia and Germany. The Germans forced them to leave their homes, and that is how many came to our area and in the course of fleeing, came to settle in Zelva. In short order, the Jews of the town gathered their persecuted brethren, and offered them a variety of assistance. When the Germans captured the town of Zelva, the ties to the surrounding towns and cities were cut, and with no sources of sustenance, economic and commercial activity came to a standstill, and the Jews began to suffer from hunger and deprivation. Under these trying circumstances, disease became rampant, and intestinal typhus claimed victims without number. The epidemic raged unchecked by any form of medical care, and only the medical corps of the German army was able to arrest the disease and its death toll. Those who survived continued to suffer.

The German Occupation

The Germans occupied these territories for about three years. They attempted to enforce law and order, and set up a commission, headed by a German-speaking Jew. A school was opened. The Jews began to feel an easing of their condition with reconstruction, and a return to a normal routine. However, it became rapidly clear that the Germans were exploiting the commission for their own purposes. They employed forced labor in the forests, and confiscated whatever the local citizenry had. In this way, the general want and absence of food intensified, and hunger reigned. These were years of want and suffering.

The First World War that claimed many millions of lives and brought loss and destruction, aroused more and more resentment and opposition in the armed forces. In 1917 after the Bolshevik Revolution, the killing of the Czar and his family, and the initial formation of the Kerensky government, unrest spread also to the German army. The fronts began to crumble, and the German soldiers unused to the intense Russian winter, with erratic supplies, began to desert the front and return to Germany with the Bolsheviks at their heels. In the town, a communist government was set up, including some townsfolk, but it didn't last long. At the same time, the Poles organized themselves into combat legions, and a new war was underway. Between wars, when no formal government was in place, various factions ruled according to their own means, generally terrorizing the populace, pillaging, plundering and stealing from whomever was around.

The Community

The *Gabbaim* of the *Beth Hamidrash* were also the community leaders. The most honored position was occupied by the Rabbi of the town. He maintained the town records. He recorded all the births, arranged wedding ceremonies, made rulings by clarification (Jews did not utilize secular courts), dealt with questions of kashruth, in particular in slaughterhouses, and also dealt with liberating Jews. The Rabbi lived in a house adjacent to the synagogue, and his modest income was supplemented by the sale of miscellaneous religious articles in addition to the above services.

The second individual, without whom it would not have been possible to maintain a community life, was the Cantor. He generally served as both a *Mohel* and a ritual slaughterer which provided him with his livelihood. For the High Holydays, he would generally organize a choir that assisted him with services. There was, to be sure, a *Hevrah Kadisha*, or burial society, that dealt with the ritual of funerals and burial. It was a volunteer organization. Relatives of the deceased were assessed according to their means to cover funeral expenses, and the digging of graves, in particular in winter, when the ground was frozen.

As to community matters, such as care for widows and orphans -- whose numbers increased after the war -- there were ombudsmen. Women of charitable disposition would make collections from townspeople for this purpose, each according to their ability. *Laskeh Freidin*, the grandmother of one of our Israeli families stood out as one of the exceptional ombudsmen of this nature.

For Passover, the community organized a *Maot Hittim* campaign for the needy. Before the High Holydays, bowls were set out in the synagogue for contributions to a variety of causes, the larger portion being for the Holy Land. In one corner, there was an alms box for anonymous gifts, which

always used to fill up. The donors rarely cared for recognition...

There were also special collections taken up, for example, if a wagon driver lost his horse. A special collection would be taken up to buy him a new horse, so he could continue to earn even that meager livelihood.

The synagogues were always full of volunteers who carried out the duties of leading prayers, reading the Torah, and blowing the Shofar on the New Year. The cantor never had a difficult time obtaining recruits for a choir, which always practiced for several weeks before the holidays. In addition, the young people would make collections for *Keren HaYesod* and *Keren Kayemet* by going house to house, and even the needy always made an effort to help fill up the box.

The Shulhauf as a Spiritual Center

The synagogue, or *Shul* square was the heart of hearts of the town. It was here that all the buildings of the community were centered. The single synagogue of the town was built of bricks and stone. This most beautiful of buildings was tall, as were the windows that were cut from stained glass. The ark was the handiwork of an artisan who, according to oral tradition handed down for many generations, dedicated decades of his life to its completion. He slept in the entrance, and the righteous women of the community looked after his modest needs. By hand, he created and connected by primitive means (before electricity was discovered) an absolutely miraculous piece of artistry: when the ark was opened, one of the figures of a Lion of Judah would present a Torah scroll grasped in its paws, and above the open door of the ark, winged figures would flap their wings, accompanied by the sound of cymbals and drums. A picture of this holy ark has been preserved, and may be found on page 65 of the Jewish Encyclopedia, Volume IV. Legend has it that the honor of opening the ark was accorded to a distinguished visitor, who upon being confronted by the image of the lion holding the scroll, expired dead on the spot. From that time on, the mechanism that moved the lion was disabled, leaving the lion immobilized within the ark.

Every community affair, even family matters, coursed through the *Shulhauf*. A town Jew lived his entire life here, from cradle to grave. As he was born, his arrival would be announced in the synagogue. Here is where he would have his Bar Mitzvah. And as a groom, led to the bridal canopy up the main street, additions to his family, with the local youth, and with the fire department orchestra, that was established in later years. A bridal canopy was erected in the center of the *Shulhauf*, and all the participants -- and who was not a participant -- brought happiness, joy, and hearty good wishes to the new couple. And it was the same, God forbid, when a member of the community was taken from us. It was rarely necessary to publicize such news, because it traveled immediately from one end of the town to the other. The entire town shared in the grief of the bereaved family, and stood ready to offer support in whatever form was required. When the deceased was taken to the final resting place, all the stores in the town were closed up. The remains of the deceased were brought to the side of the synagogue where he was accustomed to pray, and the Rabbi or the Dayan would eulogize him with feeling, and the women would openly weep for him, and the entire square took on an air of great sadness.

During the month of *Elul*, the square was full of people, when everyone, including children, would come for *Selichot* prayers late at night with lanterns in their hands. During the High Holydays, during recesses from prayer, the square would fill with Jews wrapped in their prayer shawls. These were

especially observant, and would wear their prayer shawls to and from home, not relying on the *Eruv* to permit them to carry the article back and forth...

In the religious schools, there were always nameless yeshiva students, whose needs were cared for by charitable women. It was a given to hear the sing-song of learning pouring out of the school, as well as loud, argumentative reasoning being exchanged between Talmud students. Among the young yeshiva students, there were those who were attracted to the enlightenment (*Haskalah*), but they had limited success in disseminating this school of thought to the very traditional town residents. The founding of the Zionist *Histadrut* movement kindled an interest in Hebrew language. It was the *Bet Hamidrash* that nurtured this interest in Hebrew in the period before the *Tarbut* and *Tachkemoni* schools were established.

Every *Bet Hamidrash* was amply endowed with scholars and bookcases overflowing with religious texts, and at every opportunity, especially between *Mincha* and *Maariv* prayers, these scholars would give a *Gemara* or *Mishna* lesson to the lay townspeople, that would listen with great interest. Specialists in holy articles would be brought from the "big city," though in town, there lived Leibush the Scribe, whose occupation was to write Torah scrolls.

The town youth was well occupied with culture, politics and literature. Seasonal visits by the leadership of these movements served to spur on the youth of the town. The idealistic teachers in the town added their own impetus which was not lost on the young people. Despite this, the Jew in this land felt alienated; he was born there, as were his forefathers, yet the future looked gloomy, and the potential for life as a free and independent Jew seemed very, very distant indeed.

The Fire Department

The fire department was nominally a municipal organization, but in fact, its membership, except for the Chief, was made up of Jews, and they also established the fire department orchestra. There were meager fire fighting supplies -- several hand held pails and troughs, a storage area in the center of town that also served as a theater.

When fire broke out, the firemen would gather, and townsmen that owned horses would assist them in order to bring what little equipment they had to the scene of the fire. Understandably, most of the time they were late in arriving, and it was just the wind blowing that would cause the fire to spread...

The Orphanage

The war [World War I] left many youngsters orphaned, and led to the establishment of an orphanage. Young men in particular were drawn to offer assistance to those in need. Even American Jews committed themselves to this objective, and through the Joint Distribution Committee, they sent supplies of foodstuffs. A public kitchen was erected from which hot soup was dispensed, that put some life back into otherwise dried out bones...and on top of this was added the worry of how to teach them Torah.

In the absence of a hospital, pharmacy or even a doctor, it was Epstein the *Feldsher*, who offered medical assistance to most of the sick in the town [Eastern European Jews referred to Medics by this

German term -JSB]. He would go out in all sorts of weather, with his bag in hand, and he gave a little cotton, iodine, quinine, and aspirin tablets. Those who caught cold, would have a need for cups (*bahnkess*), that were applied by women with facile hands that were skilled in applying the cups with a warm, and reddening pressure to the sick person's back, and if all this didn't help, then the afflicted departed this world, and not necessarily because of advanced age...

Occasionally, a seriously ill person would be taken to the district capital (Grodno?) or even to Warsaw to the Jewish hospital there. The expenses for such care were borne by the community at large.

"Sleep-In" with the Sick

This group supplied assistance to the sick. At night, two young men were assigned to come and sleep in with the sick person overnight.

Daily Life

Most families were large, and blessed with many children. They lived in simple houses that passed from one generation to the next by inheritance. Attached to the house there was normally a stable, or also a pen for domestic animals, and also a woodshed. Behind the house there was a small plot of land, on which there were several rows for planting vegetables, and also fruit trees that had been planted toward the end of the eighteenth century as a gift of the philanthropist, Baron Hirsch. On the edge of the town along the banks of the Zelvianka River, there was a stretch of about 100 *dunams* of land that served as a natural meadow for grazing animals. This land belonged to the Jews. Jewish shepherds would put their flocks out to graze in this meadow.

The Water Well

It was located in the middle of the square, and provided water for home use, and during fair season to all visitors, animals, even in the winter when the well was entirely encrusted with ice.

The Bath House

It was opened only on weekends. Each family followed the custom of bathing according to a set schedule. In those days, there were no bathtubs or privies in the individual homes. After several hours of scrubbing with a "brush", washing with near boiling water, and rinsing with cold, one would return home clean and fresh. This contributed significantly to the health of the resident population. In the summer, people preferred to bathe in the river, and as a result almost everyone knew how to swim.

The Ice House

This was a wide cellar, at the edge of the *Shulhauf* square, where several hundred tons of ice were stored, having been cut from the Zelvianka River, and moved to storage by volunteer labor in wintertime. Full of ice, it offered a respite in the summertime, apart from being mandatory for the sick to control fever. To put some ice on the forehead was the sought after remedy. The demand for ice was greatest at the time that the city was beset with severe illness, in particular after the German occupation, when typhus became endemic, and countless people died. The ice was the single medium that brought some relief amidst terrible suffering. During summer, the ice was also useful in preserving various foodstuffs, and in the manufacture of ice cream, by somewhat primitive manual methods.

Diet

Diet was not particularly distinguished. The principal staple was bread, corn, and small potatoes, and in the fall, some fruits and vegetables as well. Even rotten fruit was eaten, nothing went to waste. The well-to-do obtained cucumbers and cabbage, and stored them in their cellars for the winter. Meat and fish were eaten on the Sabbath or Holidays. A cow or nanny goat would give milk on most days, but in limited quantities.

There was never any concern about becoming overweight. The only one who needed to diet was a storekeeper who sold woven goods that he obtained from Lodz, the manufacturer would come with notes that he would not honor...

Clothing and Footwear

Many were involved in this area, and goods were plentiful and of good quality. There was heavy trade in woven goods, furs, and skins. Over the many years of war, large numbers of domestic animals were killed or eaten. By contrast, cotton, plastic, or synthetics were rarely heard of.

The farmers did not use shoes, and only in the winter would they fashion wooden sandals. The townspeople in particular suffered. Every item of clothing was handed down and fully utilized.

The Sabbath suit of the head of the household was turned inside out after several years of wear, and that's how its use was extended...

The Fairs

Zelva was already known as a city of commerce by the beginning of the nineteenth century. In those days, Jews would bring fruit, animal hides, and horses from Moscow and other cities. Because Zelva's location was between the main road and the railhead, the location became well known, and the merchants from the surrounding area, and even from more distant locations, came to do business. Consequently, the Zelva fairs became well known events. At the crack of dawn, thousands of farmers would descend on the city, by cart or on foot to the fair, to secure a good place in the gathering with the livestock.

The whole town prepared for the fair which was a source of anticipation for weeks in advance. About half the Jews of the town were either merchants or storekeepers. The commercial center of town was built in a square, and the property was owned by a German family that had been invited to settle there by the Russian monarchy. This family charged rent to the occupying merchants, and even to the adjacent homes, on three sides of the square, the fourth side being set aside for the livestock market.

The selection of merchandise in the stores was modest and limited. The principal buyers, household suppliers, made do with the minimum. Most families with lots of children, even the farmers, were sober folks. While prices were low, this also meant that income was also low, though there were merchants and storekeepers that succeeded in their business despite the unreasonable pressure of the municipality. The tax rate was very heavy. The tax collector, Grabski, became famous for his "squeeze," and no small number of Jews emigrated from the town as a direct result of his tactics. This *aliyah* was therefore called the "Grabski *Aliyah*."

Earning a Livelihood

There was commerce in grain. Fortunately, the city was also a railhead, and the farmers of the area and landholders brought their produce there to be sold to merchants, and several tens of families prospered in this regard. However, in the beginning of the 1930's, with government instigation, a grain cooperative was established to provide jobs to new residents, who were Polish war veterans, and in this manner, Jews were pushed out of this important branch of economic activity.

Cattle traders did a good business, since they were suppliers to the army. Butchers that catered only to the general population did only a modest business, since people refrained from meat consumption during the middle of the week. Only on the Sabbath, or holidays, did meat appear on their tables. Only the well-to-do or the sick used to buy fowl that the farmers used to bring to market from time to time, which gave rise to the joke: "when does the pauper eat chicken? when one of them is sick..."

Wagon peddlers would leave with their rigs on Sunday, and return on Friday for the Sabbath, going from village to village, and bartering their wares for agricultural produce.

Fruit merchants also tended the orchards of the nobility during flowering season, and would guard these orchards until harvest time, protecting the harvest from theft. They would deal with the crop honestly, storing the fruit and selling it for a good price and returning the profit.

The wide forests provided a livelihood for any number of Jews. Two sawmills were constructed on the banks of the Zelvianka River. The better one belonged to the Borodetzky family, several of whose descendants live in Australia, and one in Israel. The second one was built by the Jews of Volkovysk. There were also several lumber merchants. The Spector family constructed a building for this purpose in Warsaw, and did very well. The family son, Sandor, lives today in Australia. He saved himself by jumping from a train car on the way to the "Valley of Killing"(e.g. Treblinka)..

The only flour mill in the area also belonged to the Borodetzky family. All the townsfolk had need of it, including the Jews. Most families used to bring their grain to be ground, and used to wait in line for several days. The mill ran by water power, from a dam across the Zelvianka River. The most expert millers were the Jews.

About five families ran bakeries, and they provided a variety of baked goods, especially to the farmers who came to market. Town residents, including the Jews, baked week to week, filling the ovens with loaves of bread, weighing 5 to 6 kg. apiece. The well-to-do also baked challahs for the Sabbath.

Immediately after Purim, the ovens in two of the bakeries were koshered for baking Passover matzoh. The rest [was baked] in ordinary homes. The families and their branches, organized and expedited all the work among themselves. The womenfolk in white aprons, with kerchiefs covering their hair, and even young men and the boys, participated in this undertaking. The matzoh was brought home in a white case. Under the roof was a wooden cache for storage. This had served for storing matzoh, meal, and flour for matzoh balls (*knaidlach*) for more than just one generation.

Jews engaged in the distribution of goods by running horse-drawn wagons. Several worked as teamsters, hauling to and from the train station, though mainly, they were employed in hauling merchandise to the city, the valley, and from there. Important cargo, destined for the capital city, such as grain and lumber, were taken only as far as the railroad station, where they were loaded on train cars.

The cooperative bank, which was founded by the efforts of several businessmen, breathed life into the faltering economy. The high level of trust in the bank leadership attracted funds for dowries and savings, that made it possible to extend loans to local businessmen. In the capital of Warsaw, a banking center was established along these lines that assisted with organization and audit.

Several people engaged in the exchange of dollars into gold. A sense of obligation, and concern for family, motivated Jews in America to send dollars to their needy relatives. The standard method of transaction was to exchange the note for a letter in a folio, and the "Men of the Bourse" would then exchange it for gold.

There were hardy souls who engaged in the liquor trade, literally taking their lives into their hands to bring hard liquor to saloons, despite the express prohibition by the government. The trade in alcohol was legally limited to wounded war veterans.

Several families were engaged in the building trades utilizing both lumber and bricks. The flour mills in the city and environs were their handiwork. They also repaired millstones and engaged in their care.

Giving Birth...

The concept of a maternity hospital was unknown. Instead midwives, drawn from the local populace, attended the expectant mother. Birth was facilitated in the home of the expectant mother. The newborn received his first bath in a bowl of warm water. If the infant was a baby boy, then an excerpt from the Book of Psalms, including the entire chapter of *Shir HaMaalot*, was pasted on each of the four walls of the room. This was the tried and true method of providing a watchful eye over the newborn and the mother...

Members of the immediate family were nearby, ready to spread the good news. Like an arrow loosed from a bow, the news would traverse the entire town, and after *Mincha*, children and their parents would gather at the home of the newborn to recite the *Shema*, and *Shir HaMaalot*, to strengthen the

protection of the Almighty. All the invited guests contributed something for the occasion, and the rich also added candies. And from the attic, would be brought down a wooden cradle that had also served this purpose for many a generation. The infant was wrapped in swaddling clothes up to his neck to assure that he would have a straight and tall body. His mother would then nurse him till he was full, and afterwards, he was put to sleep without much trouble...

The status of the male infant changed on the eighth day, when, amidst a holiday atmosphere, and with the participation of his immediate family, the Rabbi or the Dayan, the Mohel performed his rite...and at the same time, his name was announced publicly, usually in memory of a departed grandfather or other relative.

From this day onward, the Jew began to writhe in agony and suffer... to ease his pain, his mother would rock the cradle, and if that didn't help, she would open his swaddling clothes and pour a little powder on him, her offspring lying frail, and wrapping the squalling infant up again, and, heaven forbid, he should start again... the mother would nurse her child until he started walking. He would be weaned when he began to bite the nipple he suckled on, with teeth that would have grown in the meantime...

The City of Zelva

Zelva served as a center to hundreds of villages, and was the seat of local government whose head, understandably, was an appointed Polish Christian, assisted by several deputies. The courthouse, post office, railroad station, the teachers in the public schools, the five policemen, and even the doctor sent by the central regime--all were purely Polish in character.

Two Russian Orthodox churches, and one Polish Catholic church were a magnet that drew the farmers that came in throngs to the pealing of their bells during Christian festivals.

Only the main street had any stone paving, and at that only partially so. There were no steps, and during the rainy season, or snows, one constantly had to slog through muck and mire. In summertime, and during harvest in the meadow, and in particular on return from the fields, the skies would fill with clouds of dust.

Most houses were one story high, built of wood. In the city center, there were some stone houses that had a fortress-like appearance. These served as watch stations for soldiers.

The commercial center, that was built as a square, was a center for storekeepers as well. Attached to the store was a modest dwelling for the tenants, and it had windows only on one side. The heavy stone walls served as a fortress to the standing army. Around the center, especially in the fall, wagoners would set up stands to sell fruit and baked goods.

During the season for military draft, the gentiles would gather the drafted peasants in this area, and after a ration of vodka, they would try to make merry, and in the process end up vandalizing and wrecking these stands, but these depredations did not last a long time. The braver butchers and wagoners took the fight back to these perpetrators and drove them off into the countryside...

Education

The Tarbut School

World War I left orphans, destruction, poverty and disease in its wake. Sources of livelihood were cut off, shops were left bare, after they were pillaged at the hands of invading troops. Craftsmen went idle.

The new Polish regime began to establish itself. Among its directives was the adoption of the Polish language. A public school was opened that accepted students free of tuition. The Jews, however, did not accept this development enthusiastically, and continued to send their children to *Heder*. Among the refugees that had left the city, was a Hebrew language enthusiast, Yehuda Halevi Epstein. As a result of his energy, and with the assistance of several fathers of young children, he managed to continue to organize and provide a school for instruction of Hebrew--in Hebrew--in his own home. I was among his few students. But, to our great consternation, there was insufficient encouragement offered to him, and he left us amid groans of disappointment, and returned to his town, Slonim (may his memory be blessed!). He was among those who laid the foundation for education in our universal tongue.

The responsibility for the education of Jewish youth, especially in Hebrew language, occupied many good people, but there were also many who were very devoted to Yiddish - and the Bundists, and radical Leftists, to whom the study of Polish was mandatory. The establishment of a Hebrew School was a very difficult undertaking, but there were supporters to be found, men of vision, and idealistic teachers, who satisfied themselves with very modest life styles, and they opened the *Tarbut Schule*. As we have previously pointed out, in this period, most parents had rather large families, and not much in the way of means of support. It was in these circumstances, with the dedication of all participants, that this school began to accept students, make progress, and grow. From very little, in time, the number of students grew, and the level of instruction rose as well. And we, the youth, sublimated our desires, in order to master this treasured language of ours. This arduous undertaking, however, did bear fruit, and the Hebrew language became the heritage of the younger generation.

The Tachkemoni School

There were Jews, however, who were not satisfied with schooling limited to Hebrew language, and with the passage of time, they established the *Tachkemoni* School whose objective was to impart to the student tenets of faith and studies in Holy Scripture, in addition to skills in language. This institution, as its predecessor, flourished because of the dedication of its founders and teachers.

Several Hebrew newspapers, such as *HaTzfira* were still being received before the War, however, afterwards, in its place, we began to receive the paper, *HaYom*. It would pass from hand to hand, and we would devour its contents down to the very last...

With no framework for studies available to our generation other than the *Heder*, and with an overpowering desire for enlightenment, we decided to establish a library. To this end, we went out in pairs, from house to house, to gather books from whatever was at hand, and after taking inventory and cataloguing the books, that were donated with pleasure, the library became a source of enlightenment that was not a disappointment.

In addition, the library served as a meeting place and a location for intensive Zionist activities. The old Talmud Torah building that served as an annex to the *Tarbut Schule*, also housed the library.

The Wealth of the Enlightenment

From an early age on, little boys would follow their older brethren to the *Bet Hamidrash*, to listen to Torah lessons between the *Mincha* and *Maariv* prayers from a *Maggid*, or to sharpen their thoughts along with their friends in games derived from their discussions. On reaching the age of five, the young boy began study in a *Heder*, and would even participate in prayer. Studies were conducted in the home of an instructor, called the *Melamed*, around a long table. The students would be bent over their texts and copybooks, sitting on long benches without backs, and despite the crowding, found the ambience pleasant. The period of study extended from Passover to the New Year, and back again. Recess from study was only during holidays.

After several periods in the *Heder*, individual students or small groups would continue to study with some teachers for an hour a day or every other day. The following teachers especially endeared themselves to their pupils: Joseph Matlovsky (today, Matlov, in Canada), Moshe Lubetkin (today in America) and also Shmuel Boruch Freidin who died in the Holocaust.

The desire for the riches of the enlightenment impelled others to leave for the big city to study in a Yeshiva under extenuating circumstances, because not all had subsidized eating arrangements. These were arrangements whereby a student would eat his meals, first one day with one volunteer family, and the second day with another such family, and so on.

By the time he reached *Bar Mitzvah* age, even before the formal ceremony, which took place in the *Bet Hamidrash*, he already had mastered the ritual for putting on the *Tefillin* (Phylacteries). This, he normally learned from the older boys, who took him into their group. He, feeling that from now on he was qualified to fill out a *Minyan*, found that to be more than an adequate source of pride. The wealth of this subject matter occupied him for a lifetime, because there was no outlet for him in ordinary places of employment, because those were exclusively for the Poles. It was the youngster's refuge, and he belonged to them, and that is where he dedicated the majority of his time and energy.

Just as in all the cities of Eastern Europe, so in Zelva, there was an awakening and a ferment in the Jewish community in the aftermath of the First World War, especially after the Balfour Declaration. In it, many saw what they thought would be the beginning of the Final Redemption, the only ray of light in an otherwise dark and dismal era.

The Zionist *Histadrut* movement made much of the opportunity. The large majority of the youth sought to affiliate with one or another of the Zionist branches that were nurtured by dedicated partisans. Even the fund-raising organizations like the *Keren HaYesod*, and the "blue box" of the *Keren Kayemet* could be found in almost every home, and every family repeatedly would even deny itself necessities to assure that it could contribute a few pennies in order to redeem precious land in Israel.

In a collection for Israel, a representative from the Holy Land, Dr. Yaffo spoke, and motivated the women of the community to donate their jewelry in addition to the donations of the men. The education of the children, especially after the War, occupied many qualified people, and when it

became possible to go to the big cities, the young people of our town, Zelva, began to leave for centers of learning despite the difficult economic circumstances of most Jews. The following is a list of those who left, and their destinations:

Dina and Leib Lantzevitzky - To the *Tarbut* Gymnasium in Bialystok. They live today in the U.S. Dina runs a pharmacy, and Leib Lantz is a dentist.

Rivkah Shulyak -To the *Tarbut* Gymnasium in Bialystok.

Leibel Kaplan - To the Vilna Polytechnicum.

After completing his studies, he crossed the border into Russia and joined his brothers, *Chaim, Benjamin*, and *Pinchas*, and his sisters, *Lifsha* and *Hadassah*, who were active in the establishment of the socialist-communist regime.

Sandor Spector - One of the Holocaust survivors, to the Vilna Polytechnicum, lives today in Australia.

Yaffa Spector - Sister of Sandor, also a Holocaust survivor, studied at the Vilna *Tarbut* Seminary. She also lives in Australia.

Akiva Shevisky and his sister *Esther* - To the Grodno Seminary.

Yocheved Shertzuk - To the Grodno Seminary.

My sister, *Sarah Moorstein*, and *Nehama Slutsky* - To the *Tarbut* Seminary in Vilna. My sister studied at several schools, and was considered a gifted schoolteacher. She was killed in the Holocaust, while serving as a principal of the *Tarbut* School in Slonim.

The sisters, *Dvora Geiger*, and *Haya Meiner* (née *Srybnik*¹) went to Slonim to study at the "Kunitsa" gymnasium. They both emigrated to Israel, and were devoted to one another as sisters from childhood days. They both raised families. Today they are active in a variety of community affairs, including the production of this *Memorial Book*.

Shlomit Becker (today, *Laykin*) - To the "Kunitsa" gymnasium in Slonim.

Chaim Jonah Freidin (today, *Gilony*) - To the Hebrew *Tarbut* Gymnasium in Volkovysk [where he was a classmate of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, who came from Ruzhany. -JSB]. He emigrated to the Holy Land in 1933, and is a lawyer by profession.

Dr. Nahum Gelman (Nathan Helman) -

Emigrated together with his family to Canada, and is a dentist. Today, he lives in Jerusalem, Israel.

Joseph Kaplan - To a *Yeshivah* in Vilna, and lives today in the U.S.

Isaac Nahum Gerber - To a *Yeshivah* in Vilna, and lives today in the U.S.

¹ The name *Srybnik*, also appears to be pronounced *Cherebnik*. The former is used throughout this book for consistency.

Sports

The game of soccer was just becoming popular, and all the boys, even the older ones, were eager to participate. Practice was then organized outside the city, near the lime pits of Bezalel Lisitzky.

After intensive practice, it was decided to invite the soccer team from Dereczin for a game. And, on the appointed day, while we were still waiting for the opposing team, we suddenly realized that the entire playing field had been covered with flax to be dried! We didn't think much of it, and we approached the cleaning of the field with great vigor. The game began when the curious had gathered, standing around us, and we then spied from a distance, a crowd of farmers with sticks and clubs in their hands, coming to beat us up. This precipitated a flight of the onlookers and players to town, and it was then that the chief of police got involved, and he ruled that we had to make good to the farmers for the spoilage of the flax. But where would the money come from? The only solution was: each player would have to donate two weeks of labor in mucking out the stables, and this donation of labor would be accepted as reparations.

Entertainment

Man lives not by bread alone, and as a result, a theater group was established. It was a group of young people that volunteered to do this. Heshan Zalman, a new town resident, was the stage director, and his assistants included Hannan [Elchanan] Potztiveh, among others. The players included:

Jacob Moshe Einstein, Hashka Kaplinsky, Jacob Rotner, Joseph Freidin, my sister, Esther Moorstein, Tuvia Vishnivisky, and the Lifschitz sisters.

With the fire of youth only, they embarked on this undertaking, without props, and even without a theater hall, and behold the miracle: after several weeks of intensive work a stage was constructed speedily, in cooperation with the fire fighters. On one side, a prompter's box was constructed. Benches were borrowed from houses in the neighborhood, and voilà -- a theater.

The play, *Mireleh the Milkmaid* was a success. All the participants, the director, the prompter, the players, entranced the audience, and from behind the scenes, we applauded the performance - Potztiveh, Tuvia, and I with violin playing - the emotions ran very high. The extended reaction of the audience lasted until the following performance.

From time to time, evening dances were also scheduled, and members of the Christian community would also participate, such as the doctor, the lawyer and the chief of police.

זכרתי לך

חסד

מעורר ...

"...I remember for you the devotion of your youth..."

Jeremiah 2:2

MEMORIES

Concerning The Zelva That Was...

by Chaim Gilony
(Chaim Jonah Freidin)

In order for me to write about Zelva, that typical Jewish town that was located on the principal highway between Volkovysk and Slonim in the Grodno Province, I feel that I have to close my eyes, and delve into the dark clouds of the past that I have been away from for over fifty years, from the time I permanently left in 1933. In fact, I was already gone by 1926, when I returned to Zelva only during the summer months, for the annual summer vacations from the high schools in Volkovysk and Vilna, where I was studying.

It is not among the easiest things to draw upon deeply-seated memories and the images of life in Zelva that I witnessed from childhood until the time I left. It is possible that a skilled hypnotist applying his powers to me, would succeed in eliciting images from my mind going back to my earliest childhood, because in my memory, I do have fragmentary images from the time I was four years old. But let us set these speculations aside, and I will try to raise Zelva in my memory, as the village appears to me now, over the distance of time, and from the perspective of over fifty years. I am familiar with the well known fact that the past is often veiled in a mantle, through which the bitterness and difficulties we experienced become less harsh with the passage of the fifty years since these upheavals took place.

So, my town of Zelva stands out, first and foremost in my mind, as a place where the Zionist movement dominated, and stood out over the other intellectual movements that pervaded the Jewish communities of Poland, that also found expression there, such as the Bundists, Communism and Yiddishism. The blue-white Zionist flag, and the *Keren Kayemet pushka* [charity coin box] was the legacy and property of the larger part of the Jewish population.

Its population was made up of scholars, plain folks, active merchants and tradespeople, it had factories and a number of merchants of high repute for such a small town. The synagogues of the town also attracted a loyal following among the population. The "Tailor's Synagogue," wasn't called by that name for no reason, having been founded by tradespeople of that pursuit. The biggest and most beautiful of the synagogues was the *Moiehr Beis-Midrash* (the Wall Synagogue), in which the middle class people worshipped, along with the storekeepers and merchants. The wealthiest worshipped in the *Hiltzner Schul*, and even if individuals were not so wealthy, but were considered especially distinguished, they worshipped there, including the Rabbi of the town, and the *Dayan*, and it was there that the *Maggidim* gave their sermons, and where guest Cantors performed before the Ark. There was also found here a small synagogue of unique character where the simple folk prayed, people of undistinguished calling and of a lower class. The name of this synagogue was *Shiva Kenuim* (the seven called ones). The largest and most beautiful synagogue which was available to the entire Jewish population, but was used only on High Holy Days or very special Holiday occasions, was called *Die Groiseh Schul* (the large synagogue), in which there was a beautiful Ark, which was an outstanding example of Jewish Ark craftsmanship in all of Poland.

The aforementioned synagogues, many of the schools, the home of the Rabbi, and close by the cemetery, were centered together in a separate neighborhood, and these were the centers of culture

of the town.

It was in this center that the cultural life of the community was conducted for all strata of the Jewish population, leading, among other things, to the founding of the *Tarbut Schule* approximately in 1920. The educators of the town were the *melamdim* of the *Heders*. In the *Heder* of Berel the *Melamed*, who was the *Shamess* of the Tailor's Synagogue, I reached the level of the study of *Gemara*. At a higher level, Litman the Scribe taught in his house, next door to the home of the Zlotnitzky family. The Zionist spirit, before it pervaded the streets of Zelva, was confined to a few homes where the Hebrew newspapers *Tzefirah* and *Shachar* were read, and the books of [Abraham] Mapu and [Peretz] Smolenskin. With the founding of the *Tarbut Schule*, the Zionist spirit began to grow in the town with full force. The first signs manifested themselves with the *Aliyah* of the first pioneers from Zelva to the Holy Land: Rachel (from the Barkleid family), who was one of the founders of Ra'anana, and after her, the pioneers from the families of Levin, Lifshitz, Rotni, Ephraim Gelman, Yarmus, Yechezkiel (Chatzkel) Halperin, the son of the *Kreplichah*, and others.

The most memorable of the *Tarbut Schule* teachers were, Shmuel Boruch Freidin, Shabsel (Shabtai) Ratner, and Matlovsky. The identity of other teachers, who educated the youth of the town are lost in the recesses of my memory, and doubtlessly, other members of my town will be able to recall them from memory in order to credit them with their blessed undertakings in the town.

I especially remember an incident that proves the existence of the warm Jewish soul and its affinity for culture: the marvelous celebration in the town marking the occasion of the opening of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem in 1925 (and I was then 10 years old). Youngsters, and those older than I, [Eliezer] Futritzky, Nahum Gelman (my uncle), Foyka Gelman (Ephraim), and others, these I remember immediately, constructed a gate at the entrance of the *Moiehr Beis-Midrash* and decorated it with international flags (in white and blue), and under the gate, they put up a platform, on which speakers sat, including Nahum Gelman, today, Dr. Nahum Helman of Jerusalem, [Eliezer] Futritzky, and others. From where did they draw the strength and the wisdom to speak about the opening of the university? It cannot be but a hidden inner force that worked on their souls and caused them to exert themselves to arrange this tumultuous celebration in which hundreds of young townspeople participated. The students of the *Tarbut Schule* participated in this celebration, dressed up, with their flags, and blessings were heard, and singing by the school chorus, and if my memory is not faulty, I believe that the fire department chorus also performed. This was a unique international experience, that underscored the connection between a nation and its culture, as it was expressed by the tumultuous participation of the Jewish population of the town.

This event also reminds me that by coincidence the origin of the security forces of our army, the Haganah brigades, of the fighters and dreamers, each to his own kind, was rooted in this same group of young people, and was founded in Zelva to protect the Jews of the town against gentile hooligans. I remember these young people wearing uniforms, and arming themselves in order to fight with the *shkotzim*. I especially remember the figure of Foyka Gelman standing at the head of the troop (and it was the same Foyka, who joined the partisans in fighting the Germans during the Holocaust).

To continue this narrative, let me also describe the role that our youth played in the fire department. These were Jacob Moshe Einstein, Lantzevitzky and Peikowitz in the fire department chorus, and Yitzhak Pomerantz, of blessed memory, who was familiar as a clarinet player. The young people who appeared on stage either to sing or act were, Tuvia, who surpassed in his time the cantors Rosenblatt

and Kusevitsky, in particular in singing the prayer, *Tikanta Shabbat*, and on the parody, *Al Shelosha Averot Nashim Metot* [women die because of three sins -JSB]. In a like manner, I recall the singing of Liza Gelman, during the presentation of *Yom Zeh Mechubad* in the fire department auditorium, and the singing of Esther Moorstein, and the young girl students from the various schools.

Our good friend, and Zelva community Leader in Israel, Yerachmiel Moorstein, also participated in many of these activities, as did others, who I hope will forgive me for not mentioning their names, as I am unable to bring them all to mind.

Among the personalities that stand out, are those of Mr. Aharon Rotni, and his wife Fradl, who live with us here in Israel, who over many years were workers for the *Keren Kayemet LeYisrael*. Before my eyes, I see the erect figure of the *Dayan*, Rabbi Nahum Moshe, who lived at the edge of the town, near the Sectors. Similarly, I see the faces of Rabbi Pesach Rachko, and the scholar, Rabbi Joseph Shulman. And with the ears of my soul, I hear the praying of the worshippers on the High Holy Days, the voices of Herschel the *Hocker*, of Sedletzky, and Potztiveh (if I am not mistaken). And here before me, I see the image of Rabbi from Cologne, blessed be his memory, who was the only *Hasid* in our town, and was among the first to go to the Holy Land, and he is today buried on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. It is not possible to forget the appearance of the *Tehilim Zogger* [the reciter of Psalms], for he is the father of Elke Nosatsky [also Nosatzky], who sang all the verses of the Psalms, by heart, with the congregation, in the time between *Mincha* and *Maariv* on the Shabbat in the *Moiehr Beis-Midrash*. Even more prominently, stands the figure of our late grandmother, *Bubbeh Laskeh*, who even till the end of her life, with the coming of the Germans to Zelva, was a provider to the needy, who worked indefatigably to provide food and sustenance, and was a pillar of support to the helpless.

An unusual figure that ties Zelva to President Franklin D. Roosevelt of the U.S.A. was Motti [Mordechai] Maggid, who had malformed legs, who despite his handicap, was a soccer player with all the teams, and was able to perform as if he were quite normal. When the Germans invaded the town, he corresponded with Roosevelt, and obtained assistance from him to come to the United States.

I also recall the *Maggidim*, who gave their sermons in the various synagogues, and their many topics in literature and philosophy, and the speaker (whose name escapes me) who spoke on the topic of: lovers and enemies of women. A crowning event in Zionist activities came with the establishment of a *Betar* preparation point in the yard of the *Poritz* (who, incidentally brought the first auto to town). This group used to march with pride to the synagogue, singing lustily the words: "as one we proclaimed that we shall make *Aliyah*, and we shall," to Israel, naturally.

A great deal of singing was done on *Simchat Torah*, and when one was called to the Torah for an *aliyah*, it was customary to make a substantial donation to the synagogue. The good will and neighborliness of the community was manifest in the home of our grandfather, Avraham, *Yosheh Maggid's* of blessed memory. When the season for baking matzoh in the oven at his house came, it was accompanied by singing, and the good cheer pervaded all those who partook in this mitzvah.

The entire population participated in happy occasions, such as weddings, and when the time came, in sad occasions such as funerals, and the scene at such events involved many of the people of Zelva, and was representative of the strong family spirit to be found among all Jewish communities of Poland.

A somewhat special light was cast on the large group of butchers in the village by the teacher, Litman the Scribe, who nicknamed them, *bnei bassar* [sons of the flesh -JSB], drawing this reference from the prayer, *Aleinu LeShabayach*. I felt at the time, that this was a somewhat acerbic sobriquet, since it was through their effort, and the weight of their influence in the life of the town, that the first and only bank in the town was founded, which continued to function until *The Destroyer* descended on them. The *Shiva Keriim* Synagogue was established for the almost exclusive use of the town butchers. It was from here that their noteworthy influence on the town emanated. Among them were those who engaged in the trade of meat products with countries outside of Poland, and in this fashion, created links between this small village and the outside world, especially with Germany. Merchants from Warsaw and Germany would come to the Zelva fairs, and established international trade ties with the town butchers. Our father, of blessed memory, Yitzhak (Itchkeh) Freidin, and his partners, David Yosha Srybnik, and Itcheh Jonah Freidin, who despite his limitations as a simple country man, without formal education, traveled to Upper Silesia, to Germany, and carried on business and transactions on an international scale.

The monthly Zelva fairs bear witness to the prominence of our town in Poland. These fairs began on the third day of the month, and were held for several hundreds of years up until the destruction of the town. I recall how difficult it was to get home during the fair days, because the streets of the entire town were blocked up with wagons and carts right up to the doors of the houses, beginning even up to three days before the fair opened. What could you not find at the fair? It was as if all of Poland had created, grown and opened up in spirit and in substance -- everything centered and focused on the fair. Yes, I remember the acrobats, fire-eaters and magicians, each to his own kind, candy vendors and artists, etc.

Here is the place to quote the work of the Zelva songwriter Mr. Lunskey, which he wrote during his exile to Siberia, from his book of songs, "Across the Lithuanian River," published by *Yachdav*.

ZELVA

*Zelva, in her fairs is to be praised,
 Slonim in her sesame cakes,
 You will yet be praised, my rejected village,
 In my songs, as my name becomes known.*

*And because I endured and I sang,
 And I felt an ache in my heart,
 They will raise a memorial to my name,
 In the garden of my beloved town.*

*Let a dog go by and scratch with his paw,
 A pig -- befoul her with malicious intent,
 Lest an Army General stiffen with feeling
 And hiss through his teeth: "Zhid!"*

I cannot escape my feeling of "local patriotism" regarding our town, because even then, in my youth,

I knew that the town had been mentioned in the writings of Graetz and Dubnow as an important and central town in the lives of Polish Jewry; that its marketplace was well known, in which the excommunication of the *Hasidim* by the Vilna Gaon was announced. Consequently, I wore my pride openly in front of my comrades in Volkovysk and Vilna, for having been a product of so historically important a town. Even then, as a youngster, I was driven by curiosity and interest in research to discover who were the people interred in the very oldest of the graves in the town cemetery. Several were interred in decorated stone sepulchers, with trees planted around them. Even then, I knew of the hidden treasures in the repositories of the Great Synagogue, and I heard the stories of the spirits and souls of the saints of the town, who would stand watch in the night hours over this very same resplendent synagogue. I would inevitably succumb to fear and trembling every time I would hear these stories from old and young alike. Today, when I hear lectures on the Jewish Kabbalah, and on reincarnation, these childhood experiences take on a special significance, in connection with all the souls and spirits that circulated through the night in that self-same synagogue.

Despite this, I never really considered why Zelva specifically came to become the center for the fairs that were held there. However, after giving the matter some thought, it occurs to me that it may have to do with its geographic location: the railroad that went through the town, and the river, the Zelvianka, that connected to the larger river, the Neman, on which lumber was transported to distant places. This river served as an important link to all parts of the Grodno Province, and consequently as a barrier and line of defense during times of war. The capture of the river by one of two warring factions generally meant control of the surrounding territory, and consequently, many bloody battles were fought in the vicinity, and Zelva was a "killing field" as it passed from one hand to another.

This river had romantic secrets hidden in its banks, in addition to the men and beasts who fell dead in the corners of battle around it. On its banks, ardent young men demonstrated their amorous skills, as was demonstrated in the incident of the wife of the pious *shochet*, who gave herself to a young swain on a Sabbath afternoon, planning to spend some time with him in the tall grass by the riverbanks, when they were caught *in flagrante delicto*, and became the cause célèbre of the town. It was in this river that I learned to swim. My father, of blessed memory, would take me on his back when I would go immerse myself in the water. It was on these riverbanks, next to the flour mill (which was powered in its day by water accumulated behind a dam) that had been destroyed in one of the many battles to capture the river, next to the bridge that went over the river, that I and my friends would while away the time, and even then, I dreamt the dream of the establishment of the State of Israel. In this river, and in its clear waters, the Baptists would come to be baptized, and before they would perform this act of faith, we all, old and young, would come to watch the baptismal ritual.

The hospital was right next to the river. The odor of carbolic acid would constantly waft from the hospital, and to this day, I can smell it as if it is still reaching my nose. People suffering illnesses, such as typhus, were brought to its doors. It was a strange feeling for us Jews to receive assistance from the hospital. A feeling as if we were "beyond the boundaries." Nonetheless, the fact of its existence was further evidence of the uniqueness of our village.

I remember the strolls along the *Haufgasse*, and passing the saw mill of our town's richest citizens, the Borodetzky brothers, and then approaching the apple orchards of the *Poritz*, Boshilov with the feeling of participation in the preparatory labors of our pioneers, who were getting themselves ready for the hard toil in the future, if and when their emigration to the Homeland would materialize.

Like a moving picture, people from all walks of life pass before my eyes, beginning with the prosperous manufacturers, the Borodetzky brothers, and ending with the tailors, and shoemakers occupied in their work. I remember well, carpenters like Grunberg, of blessed memory, and builders of wooden houses, Alter Goy, and his two sons, (who built the house I lived in until I moved to Israel), the barber, in addition to the gentile barber, who apart from his primary vocation, sold leeches for medicinal purposes and for bloodletting; the bread bakers: Moti-Meir, the father of Pesha and Henia Peikowitz, and the bakery that was next to the house of Itcheh Yudelicheh's; I can still taste his *zemel* rolls in my mouth; The bagel bakers on Schneider Street, Fradel Rotni, the owner of the general store right next to our house, from which we got not only our foodstuffs, but also our school supplies as well. Her husband, Aharon Rotni, made carbonated water and ice cream, The manufacturing merchants, the Slutskys, and the famous Herr Manzheh, and the vigorous merchants in the line of the small stores of the *Volksdeutsche*, Herr Schuchart, who added unique color and atmosphere to the diverse activities of our small town.

Kreineh Freidin was the most famous of the folk healers in the town and surrounding villages, to whom myriads would flock. She utilized incantations, balls of dough from fresh bread, and bones. She brought relief and succor to all manner of swellings in various parts of the body, and would remove the curse of the "Evil Eye" with a glance. She would receive all manner of agricultural produce in payment for these services, as well as eggs from gentiles, who would constantly flock to her, knocking on her door, which was right next door to the house I was born in, and in which I lived until I left for the Land of Israel.

As regards matters of health and healing arts, it is appropriate to recall the *Feldsher* Epstein. He was the doctor as well, and he was held in awe by all the townspeople, especially during the typhus epidemic, and I was then only a boy of four. I remember when he came to visit my grandmother, Michlah Gelman, of blessed memory, after she contracted typhus, and it was his diagnosis that she would certainly die, and indeed, that is exactly what happened after his visit.

It is also appropriate to recall the gentile *feldsher*, who according to my natural impression to this day, appeared to be a good gentile who was dedicated to caring for the ill, and he cared for them with conviction; as is also recalled with favor, our pharmacist, Ethel *die apthekerin*, who also healed the sick, and was someone who helped the sick not less than the *feldshers* themselves. She continued to do this, until she emigrated to Canada, along with the family of my grandfather, R'Avraham Gelman (son of Yosheh the Maggid, and four of my uncles and two of my aunts). After many happenings, and the passage of many years, a son of my grandfather returned to us in Israel, and today, Dr. Nahum Gelman is a dentist (in Zelva, he too was a pharmacist, and an assistant to Ethel the pharmacist, and he also emigrated to Canada). One of those uncles was the most popular Zionist lecturer in the town, and he really livened up the spirit of the occasion when the Hebrew University was established in Jerusalem. He was a uniquely responsible individual in his day in the town. He also was a revolutionary, and an expert in personal powers, who left the precincts of the *Bet Hamidrash*. As it happens, he was the only one in the town who studied the Talmud at night, as if it were day, and he even slept in the *Bet Hamidrash*. He was able to set a direction based on his revolutionary ways, and obtained a position at the post office in Gamina (the town) where he worked, even on the Sabbath, which sharpened the efforts of Rabbi Nahum Moshe, the Dayan and other town notables to alter his compromises with the exigencies of earning a livelihood to escape both unemployment and degeneration. Because of this initiative, this left an impression on me as a young boy. I was proud of my freethinking Zionist uncle whom I admired so very much.

In attempting to delineate a portrait of our town, I couldn't compromise on the impact made by my uncle's image in making so aggressive an impression as he did, whether it was necessary or optional as it was seen in those days by the majority of the town population.

If we are indeed discussing matters of health, then it is appropriate to also recall the town bath house, which also contributed to the health of the Jewish citizenry of Zelva. There were those who used the important services of this institution on Fridays, or towards the end of the week as the Sabbath approached, and there were those who used it only on the eve of holidays. It was a unique experience for me to go to the bath house with my father, of sainted memory, and to see the important Jewish men of the town nude, such as Reb Moshe Tschomber, who was "well hung," and those who would spray each other on the shoulders with boiling hot water, using whisks from the top steps for a couple of seconds, because it wasn't possible to stand it for more than a couple of seconds, and in order to catch one's breath, it was necessary to immediately pour pails of cold water on them, and much steam would rise, to the point that it was not possible to see who was to be found in the chamber.

I also recall stories of the times that the women would come to the Mikvah for purification, in a side section of the bath house, and of incidents where there was contact between the sexes, and these tales were undoubtedly embellished and these happenings became the subjects of stories and jokes in the town. I have the impression that this was a Jewish institution only, and that the gentile population of the town did not make use of it at all. In this vein, I recall that from time to time, this institution required repairs and improvements that ran into a lot of money, and for lack of financial resources, it was not possible to implement these repairs and improvements for many long months, and therefore there was a singular difficulty, that involved risk to life, if one wanted to use it during the winter season when there was snow and ice.

Sports, athletics and playing soccer are also subjects that relate to maintaining good health. In my memory, several soccer games come and arise between our town youth (who doesn't remember Abraham Perlmutter, who could kick a soccer ball to such great heights?) and the police force, the gentiles, or playing against a team from Dereczin. The soccer players were high in the affection of our youngsters. Across the river and toward the meadows, a field was set aside for playing hockey, which was played by selected teams, and these games, the teams played on fields in the middle of town, like the field across from the fire house, or the field opposite the "Gemina" which served as a market for the sale of horses during the fairs, before the horse market was transferred to a location at the back of Volkovysk Street. In this regard, I recollect a singular effect on my health, caused by playing soccer. Instead of contributing to my health, these games caused me to develop an accumulation of water in the pulmonary membranes, and for several, long months, I was in the care of Dr. Aaronson in Volkovysk, who succeeded in curing me without using the newer cures of the day, notwithstanding the severity of the cure, and its duration -as I said- many months, and here I was a young man, who was by myself in Volkovysk, and I went to the doctor as if I were a full grown patient in all respects.

In addition to soccer, we made use of the ladders in the fire house, and other equipment, although this was primitive by our standards today, in order to exercise and improve our physical condition. We used this equipment with the support of Mr. Schuchart, the *Volksdeutsche*, but the truth is, that I do not know how the youth of the town made use of the equipment. However, I won't compromise the truth if I say that these young people also learned to play all the brass and woodwind instruments in the firemen's orchestra ensemble that had been established, and also worked to put on fire-fighting

demonstrations, especially after the town acquired a modern fire engine.

Advancing progress did not skip over our town either. In order to accommodate new fire engines, and for the health of the populace, the wells of the town were ordered to be repaired, and a water hydrant was installed opposite the fire house. This was a festive occasion, the time when the ground was broken and work begun for the first hydrant in town, after long weeks of drilling in the place. Looking back today, I really feel that if oil were struck after an extended drilling operation of this sort, it would not have caused any greater joy than this drilling did to the townspeople, when the well succeeded in bringing up clean and tasty water, that they then brought to their houses in pails. Instead of using water that we would draw up in a pail from the well that was adjacent to our house (and who doesn't recall that well near our house?), instead of muddy, polluted water, in which with bare eyes you saw living insects swimming around, instead of the danger that confronted you in the winter months, the time when the ice around the well practically covered the opening, and it was necessary from time to time to work hard to remove the layers of ice around the mouth of the well, because otherwise you risked possibly falling into the well itself, we had the privilege of being able to draw our water with the help of the hydrant, which in our eyes was truly one of the great wonders of the world.

In recording impressions about our town, we cannot skip over the constabulary. The prefect of police, the policemen, and the jailhouse itself that was beneath the police station. These were established by the Polish regime, and it was at their behest that things were done. As to street cleanliness, when the prefect of police came to inspect the town, the populace was responsible for cleaning off the areas beside their homes, and to pull out all the grass growing between the cobblestones. This was generally a festive occasion, in which all members of the household, and next door neighbors participated, and in the end, no prefect would even come. The jailhouse was in general empty, but from time to time, particularly during the fairs, its population would consist of an occasional drunk or so. Truly serious offenders were generally sent to the county jail in Volkovysk, which was the county seat for the area. However, it would occur that even one or another Jew from our town would end up in the Volkovysk prison, for bootlegging moonshine, or illegal money changing, as in the case of the arrest of my father, of sainted memory, who was caught in possession of *valuta*, or foreign currency, but these were generally released immediately, at most after a few days. In general, there was no Jewish crime in Zelva.

An independent Jewish governance, derived from the consent of the heads of the community and its distinguished citizens, existed in Zelva as long as I can remember, and there is no doubt that this pattern of life had gone on for the hundreds of years in which a Jewish community existed there. The gentiles of three denominations lived in a separate area, from which they nevertheless would send their pigs to forage in the Jewish yards, but the Jews who drive them off with blows, and this caused fights to break out between our young people and the gentile youth. A few Jewish families lived outside the Jewish neighborhood, at the edge of the town and near its entranceways, as was the case with my aunt's family (my father's sister) Hannah Sarah Bublecki, along with her husband, and their children, Jejna (Jonah), Kattel (Yekatriel), and Chaya who were the first victims who were killed by the Germans, after their gentile neighbors informed against them.

The first driver, the first bus that ran between Zelva and Volkovysk, the first and only gas station in the center of town, opposite the field in front of the *Moiehr Bet Hamidrash*, has left the impression in my memory that our town also and begun to take its initial steps into the motorized and mechanical age. It is my impression that the town's only locksmith, and bicycle sales and repairman

(whose name I forgot), was the first to travel to Volkovysk to learn how to drive a bus, and that returns us to those wonderful days of bicycle riding in the cobblestoned streets of the town, after we learned to bicycle ride, and the romantic days of ice skating on the ice, and of sleigh-riding on the snow from the top of the hill on which the Russian Orthodox Church stood, to the bottom near the water hydrant and the Gemina building.

Thus, in addition to the spiritual and cultural enjoyments and the various youth activities, were added periods where we could enjoy the many pleasures available in the bosom of nature, and in the beautiful environment of the town, in which nature is able to bestow pleasure and joy by the handful.

It is important to research and place on the record the deeds of the townspeople from the time of the Second *Aliyah* (if there weren't already such people in the First *Aliyah*?) and their contributions to developing the Homeland and the generations they brought forth to follow them. There is no doubt that since the Zelver seed and root was vibrant and full of Jewish life and essence, so it must be true of their offspring, trees, branches and fruit, whether in The Land or in the Diaspora. About a Zelver, one can say with certainty, that even if he is found in the Diaspora, only his physical being is there temporarily, but indeed, his soul and spirit is bound to Our Land, and is found there.

The things that have been written, and will be written by those that have come from Zelva, and will be enshrined in a *Memorial Book* as an permanent testimony and eternal remembrance of this sacred community and its Jews, will profoundly touch the hearts and souls of those who come from this town, and those that had a connection to its residents, even if they themselves are of different geographic origin, because we recognized that there was a special grace and magic to this little village.

Then, *The Abrogator* descended on Zelva, our town. Tractors and rollers razed its houses, its schools, its theater and its gardens. There are no Jews there any more, nor will there ever be Jews there anymore, after the Nazi exterminators wiped them out, burned them, and uprooted every remnant of Jewish life that existed there. And so all the treasure and property that was accumulated for generations by the Jews of our town was lost, but woe betide those who can sustain such a loss and then not remember.

BLESSED BE THEIR MEMORY !

Let us visit, work around, and care for the Trees of Zelva that were planted in the *Forest of Martyrs* in memory of our community. At all time, let the memory of our dear ones stand before us as a symbol and a sign, that our people and nation will continue to live, to grow and prosper on our fruitful Holy Land, in Israel, our beloved and dear country.

Memories of Home

Dora Geiger & Haya Weiner
from the Srybnik Family

Much has already been written about our town of Zelva. We don't remember a great deal, because from the age of about 9 or 10, we went to Slonim, to attend the Kunitsa Jewish Gymnasium, in which the language of instruction was Polish.

For holidays, and in the summer for two months, we would return home, to Zelva.

We can remember the town, and part of its streets well, in addition to the neighborhoods that were close to us. Our mother's family the Selman family, and across the street was our father's family, the Srybniks. The real name of the family was Kahan or Kagan, since they were a family of *Kohanim*, but the name was changed to Srybnik some generations before, on account of one of the sons being drafted into the army.

Our family had been in Zelva for generations. The house in which we lived was an ancient building. Its walls were made of thick stone (about one meter thick). It had deep windows, and on its sills were put several rows of brick flowerpots. Also, the interior of the house was full of flowerpots. We remember a ficus tree that occupied a central spot in a room, and we, the children, were supposed to clean up the leaves that fell from it. It was our mother who loved the flowerpots, a pleasant, alert and effervescent woman, who looked after us five children, to assure our education and that we would acquire insight and skills.

There was a large oven in the house that was used to bake bagels. This was our grandfather Yosha's occupation, the father of our father, of sainted memory. Afterwards, it was also used to bake Passover matzoh for the townspeople for many years.

Our family had many branches. A large part emigrated to the United States and to Argentina.

Father, together with partners, was involved in the meat business, and from time to time also dealt in grain. His partners were leading cattle dealers distributing to Warsaw and Germany.

We recall, while being in Warsaw, we studied there after finishing our schooling in Slonim, that there were merchants who received an undertaking from our father to provide us with funds to allow us to meet our needs, and on many occasions, we were invited to their homes during holidays, in order that we not feel lonely in the big city.

After we graduated from school in Warsaw, Haya emigrated to the Holy Land in September 1933, and Dora in September 1935.

We had another sister, Rivkah, who was already close to being saved. Haya's brother-in-law made a trip to Poland in 1939 in order to bring her to the Holy Land, but when he reached Lvov, the war broke out, and he could not reach Zelva. He had no alternative but to return to the Holy Land as quickly as possible, taking two months with considerable tribulation, and by highly indirect means. Thus Rivkah was denied a means to elude the talons of the Nazis, and became a victim of the terrifying Holocaust along with the other members of the family there.

We recall a unique incident told to us by our parents.

The Zelva veterans who survived the First World War, made a pledge that they would all contribute to having a Torah scroll written, and would donate it to the Great Synagogue of Zelva. Our father, David Yosha Srybnik, Itchkeh (*Laskeh's*) Freidin, Israel Shulyak, and several others, took upon themselves the task of actually writing the *Sefer Torah*. The project took many years, seeing that it involved a considerable expense, but thanks to the stubborn dedication of the scribes, the work of writing the Torah scroll was completed, which was then splendidly covered and decorated with all the usual paraphernalia, and in a festive parade, underscored with accompaniment by an orchestra, and under a suitable canopy, they all stepped along the full length of the main street of the town with the Torah to the Great Synagogue.

This was a great celebration for everyone in town, especially for the volunteer scribes, and the sponsors who lived to see their pledges fulfilled and redeemed. Afterwards, a large and festive party was put on. Our mother, Esther, (*David Yosha's*) Srybnik, was the spirit behind it.

For most of the Zelva townsfolk, whose lives were pretty routine, this scene was something truly unforgettable, and served as a topic of conversation for quite a long time afterwards.

Many other episodes took place in Zelva, but have been forgotten with the passage of time. It is a pity that we can recall so little at so late a time, when we can place on record our recollections of our childhood years in Zelva, that with the passage of time pass on from our memories and are forgotten.

An so, *The Abrogator* descended on this effervescent Zionist town, and on its residents, who live there for so many generations.

MAY THEIR MEMORY BE BLESSED!

My Town

by Joseph Vishnitzky

As we are moving further away from the period of the Holocaust with the passage of time, the impact of this terrifying tragedy overpowers me even more greatly, both on a personal and universal plane, and a terrible sense of guilt will follow me to my dying day, that I did not have enough sense, at the time, to bring my family with me to the Holy Land.

It is hard for me to get used to the idea that all the cities and towns that I knew so well no longer exist. From the dark swirls of time, images of my town and her populace form before me, who in the exigencies of the day, struggled with great ardor for each loaf of bread, yet without compromising more lofty goals such as education and culture. Despite the difficult economic conditions, there was a rich cultural life, whose crowning glory was the *Tarbut* School, which would not be an embarrassment even when measured against any of the good schools in the Holy Land today.

They lightened their drab existence by the value placed on pioneering initiatives, which imbued the youth with a love of life and new hope.

One of the figures that floats around in my memories is of a talented Jewish man (I forget his name, but I think he was a watchmaker) Zalman? [Possibly Zalman Brash, as described by Rivkah Wasserman later in this book. -JSB] He was the living spirit behind drama presentations and entertainment. He directed the plays and lead the choir.

Believe me, every time I hear the singing of *Shir HaMaalot*, it seems to me, and I feel again, and it always seems to me, that our version that was sung in Zelva was the best of all the others that I have heard to date.

And if there should be those in generations to come who will want to research our passing, and to return to our roots, I would want the world to know, and not to forget, that proud and honest people lived in Zelva, who were raised and lived there, and who were annihilated, that were not afraid of the gentiles who surrounded them, and when necessary, knew how to defend their honor.

The Jews of Zelva donated a great deal to Zionist causes and to our international rejuvenation as a people.

Here in Israel, you will not find the emigrants from Zelva in the aisles of the Bourse, you will find them among those who worked hard all their lives, and who did a great deal to build the Homeland.

The Departure From Home

by Emanuel Vishnitzky

In 1935, my brother Joseph was already in the Holy Land for two years, and we were receiving letters from him in which he indicated that he was working on getting me into the Holy Land with the help of my uncle.

My uncle had an orchard in Rehovoth, and each head of an orchard had permission to recruit labor from outside the country. In less than two months afterwards, we received a letter in which was an invitation for me to come to the Holy Land. We were overwhelmed, and didn't know quite how to react, and I was at that time only 18, from a small town, having never set foot outside of its boundaries, not even to neighboring Volkovysk, and here I have to travel to Warsaw, the capital of Poland. In our home, there was great joy: the second son is going to the Land of Israel! I saw my father, one of the strongest men in Zelva, crying at the side of the train, and I was crying along with him, as if I were just a little boy. That was the first time in my life that I ever saw my father cry, and this picture has remained engraved in my memory. To this day, I remember my little brother's words, who was then a member of *Hashomer HaTza'ir*: "the day is not long in coming when I too will come."

However, to my everlasting sorrow, he, along with the remainder of my family, stayed behind in Zelva. My mother, Shifra, didn't know where to start: there was little time and much to do. I needed warm underwear sewn for me (*gadkes mit bendlach*). In short, there wasn't enough time to cry. My mother traveled with me as far as Brestovich. Her whole family was there, and it was only when we got there that she first began to cry from great joy. On the train there were many Polish students, who jeered at my mother with their chant: "out of here to Palestine!" My mother yelled back at them, crying as she said: "yes, he's leaving - but to Israel." I went directly to my brother in the kibbutz of *Hashomer HaTza'ir*, to freedom, today called *Ramat-HaShofet*.

The members of the kibbutz, received me in absolutely outstanding fashion, despite the fact that they knew I was a radical Betarist, and I could never forget this. I was a guest of the kibbutz for a month. After this, I went out to work along with everyone else. I ended up working in my uncle's orchard, but then we fell on hard times that I didn't know or dreamed could happen. The work was oppressive. At night, when I returned from work, I used to fall on my bed from over-exhaustion without eating dinner. Despite all this, I sent letters home in which I indicated that everything was fine with me, in order to keep my mother happy.

After a while, I worked up enough courage to leave the job in my uncle's orchard, not realizing that on the outside, hard times were waiting for me, and it was then that I joined the Haganah, and from there - to the British Army.

In 1947, I met my future wife, who was born in Tzisov, and was a partisan during the Holocaust period. As of today, we have three children: Deborah, Shafirah, and Eli.

Our son, Eli, was seriously wounded in the Yom Kippur War. He was a commander at the Suez Canal, and was captured by the Egyptians. Today, thank God, he is healthy and well. Today I am retired, and a grandfather to lovely grandchildren, like all of our Sabras.

Memories of My Town

by Dvoshka Bar-Nir (Ravitz)

In 1934 I left home for school in order to get ready to go to the Holy Land. I saw what was coming. It is good that I wasn't late for the train.

My sister, Rivkah, went to the Holy Land two years before I did. My cousin, Hadassah, reached the Holy Land in 1946, after she survived seven levels of Hell.

My mother said: "children, begin your preparations, and make *aliyah*, and perhaps we too will be able to reach you afterwards." It was as if a premonition of evil had possessed her, notwithstanding the fact that our economic circumstances were still tolerable, because we had been farmers in Zelva for many generations. My father tilled the soil using hired help. We didn't lack for food, but man lives not by bread alone. Five years later, when I returned home from my schooling to get ready to leave for the Holy Land, everything had changed. My parents had gotten old, and both of them were sick, and my father was very worried. He had no other means by which he could support the family. My brother, Moishel, was in the army. My sister, Pearl, helped with the house work, and studied at night. The atmosphere in the house was difficult. The odor of smoke from the fires to come could already be sensed in the air. People said that the war could not be stopped, and it would break out, apparently, pretty shortly. In Germany, Hitler had risen to power, and his influence was recognized in Poland as well. The bubbling anti-Semitism was fomented by the statutes of the regime. The economic condition of the Jews of Zelva became more desperate day by day. The sources of income for storekeepers, merchants and working people were shut off. There was no peace or tranquility. Yet, the youth of the town still pursued various lines of endeavor, and the life of the *Tarbut* [school] continued along its normal course. The children continued to learn, and parents struggled to earn their sustenance, but you could feel the despair. But not even one of the young people conceived of their future as being in Zelva. To a one, they dreamed of the Land of Israel. The large majority of the young people belonged to one or another of the Zionist organizations, whether *HeHalutz*, *Poalei*

Zion, HaShomer HaTza'ir, or Betar. They all organized themselves and worked in order to make *aliyah*, to a better life than what they had in Zelva. I remember when I took leave from my parents and all my family. My father was a good and honest man. In his dealings with other people, he always looked for the good side of things. In my entire life, I only saw him cry once: at the side of the train as I embarked on my journey to the Holy Land. My mother was ever the optimist. She was a bubbly woman, well known for being good-hearted, a volunteer to help in Zelva, a dedicated mother and good homemaker. Our home was a warm place, where the door was open to anyone who was distressed or needy. My mother was always receiving guests with love and a smile. I recall, that people on our street would turn to her, asking that she write letters on their behalf to their relatives in America, to request that they send clothing or money. She wrote these letters in a style and tone that was uniquely hers, and in a short time, they would always receive what they had asked for.

The cherished likeness of my parents will go with me forever. I will never forget the last Sabbath that I celebrated at home. Sabbath morning, my father returned from the synagogue, and we sat around the table to eat our traditional warm meal, and in honor of my impending departure, my mother had prepared all sorts of delicacies that I liked. We sat by the table and toasted each other with *L'Chaim*, as I sampled my mother's delicacies, trying with all my might not to burst out into tears, lest I ruin the festive atmosphere that suffused all corners of the house. I sensed the tension around me, and I looked for an opportunity to leave the table. I had a feeling that this was my last chance to see my family that I loved so much, and to sit in its midst.

I remember the first bus in Zelva. The route was from Slonim to Dereczin, and from Volkovysk to Zelva. The bus used to arrive towards dusk. The whole town used to be as if on wheels. anxious to see, as if they were running to put out a fire. The children especially used to run after the driver, pleading with him to let them go into the "little house that ran on wheels," and in general, they saw in the driver a kindred spirit.

I remember the fairs at Zelva which were renown throughout the area, especially the monthly fair that took place on the third of the month. There was usually fair once a week on Thursday. People would ride all night in horse carts in order to get there early in the morning with their merchandise in order to get one of the better selling spots. You couldn't cross the street on those days from sheer overcrowding.

The *Haufgasse* is etched into my mind, on which we strolled Saturday nights, after leaving the *HeHalutz* branch. I remember the train station, which was not far from our home, and the *Bershter Wald* [the Bereshko Forest], the crisp clean air, that was suffused with the scent of pines. We came to this forest nearly every Sabbath, taking with us food for the entire day, and whoever wanted a drink of cold milk, used to go to the establishment of Jacob Lantzevitzky, and drink there on such occasions. I also remember the Bereshkovsky family which lived in Bereshko. It was a very well respected family.

I will never forget my family and my childhood years in Zelva, -- not ever!!

Before The Holocaust

by Rivkah Wasserman (Ravitz)

In our little town, Zelva, there was a church at the top of a high hill that stood like a fortress. From the back side of the hill, we used to slide down on sleds from the heights to the Slutsky home at the

bottom. The east side served as a mock battlefield for the games of the youngsters on the Sabbath. Further down, there was a pasture that was used to grow wheat, that was sown in rows, and the wheat was beautiful and romantic, and the place drew young couples for strolls, and lovely places to take such walks were not missing in Zelva. To the north, one could see a forest of pine trees, and at its end was the town of Bereshko. In the spring and summer, this was a place where young people would come to spend time, and in the summertime, it was used as a sanatorium for curing the ill, especially those who suffered from tuberculosis. They would rent rooms from the gentiles who lived there, who also supplied them with such needs as milk, fruit, vegetables and the like.

In times of economic crisis in Zelva, when heavy taxes were imposed, and the harvest was meager, the Jews and gentiles suffered alike, but those Jews who made their living by serving the gentile population were especially hard hit. In the summer, the situation was generally a little easier, because there was seasonal work to be had. There was work in tobacco to be had from the nobleman (*Poritz*) of the area, who used to hire women workers from the surrounding villages, and even Jewish women had an opportunity to work there. And in similar fashion, the two sawmills that were in Zelva provided seasonal work to the townspeople.

After the First World War, when Poland was restored as a nation, the Jews were driven from the property that they had occupied. That is how Jews began to arrive in Zelva from the surrounding villages. While they were rooted there, their cultural level and the level of Jewish education among their children was somewhat deficient. In town, they tried to survive by becoming innkeepers, after arriving with little in the way of possessions, however, despite the best of intentions, their economic circumstances were difficult, because in town it was hard to get permission to open up an inn, and they couldn't make a living from farming anymore.

Towards the end of the 1930's, an emigration to South America began, especially to Argentina, and also to Canada. This was a period of growth in Argentina. The FIKA organization, established by Baron Hirsch, supported the Polish Jews farmers who wanted to emigrate in order to establish Jewish settlements in the hinterlands of Argentina. Several of the young people in Zelva, who simply could not find satisfactory outlets for themselves, and saw no future in their town, succeeded in emigrating to various countries.

Most of the young people of Zelva came from worker families, and they established there a branch of the *Poalei Zion*, while the middle class children established *Hashomer HaTza'ir*, and *HeHalutz*. All of these laid a foundation for socialistic Zionism. Despite the trying circumstances, they overcame all the obstacles, working hard by day, and studying by night. There were those who were very capable as leaders in scholarly matters, and they organized clubs, from which many gained significant knowledge, because not all parents were capable of imparting enlightenment and knowledge to their children. There were clubs for literature, economics, natural sciences, geography, and other subjects. This cultural work filled Zelva with substance, and the youth of the town took a great interest in it. And Zelva youth served as a role model to others, and the name, "Zelva Chapter," preceded us in the *HeHalutz* and *Poalei Zion* organizations of our area. In 1924 we already had a following of *Hashomer HaTza'ir*, and I remember the first *halutzim* who made *aliyah* to the Holy Land. The conditions in the Holy Land at the time were very trying, and the pioneers from Zelva and other places fought for their survival, and were ground down because of grueling work, suffering from hunger, and attacks of yellow fever, yet only about one percent returned to Zelva, and among those were the two sisters, Hannah and Malka Lifshitz.

In Zelva, we succeeded to organize the workers, and we obtained permission to form a worker's union. We established that all the trades would be organized by the Zelva workers union. All employers knew that the Jewish workers did not work more than 8 hours a day. Even the *Poritz*, who controlled most of the summer jobs in the area, knew this, and took it into account.

I remember the first of May in Zelva, and the times we marched in the streets with slogans, singing songs, and dressed in uniforms. There were times when we did not obtain permits to celebrate May Day in this way, because informers would give prejudicial information to the police about us. There never seemed a lack of people willing to inform on us this way in Zelva, nevertheless, most of the time we got our permit. Even if we wanted to organize a meeting, if someone came from a central office, we were forced to apply for permission. Every young man and woman, without exception, belonged to one or another of the youth organizations in town. It was the cultural pursuits that occupied the position of greatest respect. At the beginning of the week, a schedule was drawn up, and every evening there was some activity dedicated to the interests of that chapter of the youth group. Every Saturday night, we used to organize a literary debate. The debaters were selected from the members of the chapter, and even from other chapters. Pro and con sides were selected, and that's how public debates were organized, which were of great interest to many participants. Those who participated learned public speaking, and a channel was opened to them for reading and independent thought. Among the books that I remember being debated were, *Crime and Punishment*, *Buntzia Sahok*, and *The Trial*, by Kafka.

Every Jewish household always had a daily newspaper. My parents used to read *Dem Heint*, and I also read the weekly *Freiheit*, and the monthly *Befreiung*. There was also a chapter newspaper called *Dos Vort*.

Zelva also had two drama studios: one was the *Poalei Tzion* studio, and the second belonged to the membership of the *Tarbut* school. The members were middle class.

The head of the *Poalei Tzion* drama group was Zalman Brash, who also was the director and the leading actor. He was a man of exceptional energy and capability. He would also do all the decorations and makeup. The actors were often members of the chapter as well. If the show was a success, they would take the production to surrounding towns, and the proceeds were used to acquire books for the library. They used to buy the better quality books in order to really be able to learn from them. The second company used to donate its profits to the town library. I remember the names of several of the players, such as Taibel Kaplan, Bashka Kaplinsky and her husband, Esther Moorstein, and Leitzia Vishnievsky. From time to time, teachers from the school would also perform. I was particularly impressed by Bashka Kaplinsky's performance in *Mireleh Ephrat*, and her performance, which was truly outstanding, was talked about for a long time in Zelva. Travelling drama troupes used to come to Zelva, and we were fortunate to see companies from the Ukraine, Romania, and even Ida Kaminska and her company reached us. The drama hall in Zelva was a long wooden shed whose second half served as the firehouse. Evening entertainment was organized in this hall, as in the case of Purim, and for those occasions, the walls were decorated so that the bare beams would not be visible. This humble shed was transformed into a cultural center for all the townspeople, because when a play was put on, even the adults came to see it.

We, the young people, were occupied with collecting donations. In pairs, with boxes in our hands, we would pass through the town, soliciting the townspeople for donations to *Keren Kayemet*, *Keren*

HaYesod, Rabbi Meir Baal-HaNess, etc. We also participated in the sending of gifts (*Shalach Manoss*) on the Purim holiday.

We had a orchestra with all brass and woodwinds, and violins and mandolins. The orchestra performed at all town events, such as weddings, and Hanukkah and Purim celebrations, during which time a Beauty Queen for the town was also selected. This entertainment was organized at the *Tarbut* school, and if a large crowd was expected, it was scheduled for the firehouse building. Even the Polish intelligentsia used to come to these events. Most of the teachers at the *Tarbut* school were natives of Zelva, and only a small percentage were brought in from the outside. Rachel Kaplan was the first kindergarten teacher in Zelva. For the kindergarten, a large room was set aside in the *Tarbut* school. The kindergarten operated for a year or two, but was closed for lack of sufficient children.

As for my family, my grandfather was a landowner with a lot of property. He willed a substantial part of this to my father, and yet enough land remained for the rest of his children. The origin of these holdings goes back to the time of Czar Alexander II, who apportioned lands for use by the Jews. The sovereignty was in the hands of nobility, and the Jews had to pay them very heavy taxes.

When the income from these lands deteriorated seriously, my father sold most of the land off, but retained a plot for growing vegetables. Even during the time when my father would work the land in the summer, he would engage in commerce during the winter season. He had a partner, and my mother also helped out. He had a Grade A commercial permit, and we were well off. For many years, we had two non-Jewish servants: a *shaygetz* [non-Jew], who helped my father with the farming, and was practically the house steward, and a *shiksa* [non-Jewess], who helped my mother with the house work. However, when the government changed, and times changed as well, the amount of money we had dwindled. My father was forced to sell off his remaining land, but he still engaged in business to some extent.

The older daughter, Dvoshka and myself, went to off to school. The younger ones, my sister Pereleh, and my brother Moshe, stayed home with my parents. After six years, when we returned from school in order to get ready to make *aliyah*, there wasn't so much as a penny left in the house. My parents had gotten old, their health was not too good, and it was very difficult to find ways to make a living. The essential question was how to find the money that was needed for me to make *aliyah* and leave. That was when my father decided to travel to a town and take a loan from a gentile he knew there. They praised him, and honored him there very much, and he earned their trust. They even jested with him when they said: "Pesach, what kind of a Jew are you that you don't even know how to be devious!" And that's the way it was: the gentile brought the needed funds, conveying his desire to be rid of the daughter of Pesach and Tzeitel. At Saturday noon, he brought the promised money, we drank a *L'Chaim*, and we parted very good friends. And in the same manner, the *aliyah* of my sister Dvoshka was also arranged, literally at the last minute, at the time the Germans invaded Danzig.

The question can be asked, as to where did my parents get the money to repay their loans to the gentiles.

During the good times, my father was in the habit of buying valuable goods, such as wagon parts, farming tools, and also gold, and he would hide them in the eaves under the roof. When they became pressed for funds, they would take some of these items and sell them. Thanks to my parents, who lived frugally, my sister and I were saved, and though my brother Moshe was denied this escape, since

he was past draft age, after the Russians invaded our area, he was drafted immediately. After that, my parents never saw him and he vanished without a trace.

My little sister Pereleh did not want to leave our aged and frail parents alone. The Russians afforded her every opportunity to work and study, and thereby Pereleh worked extremely hard to assure sustenance for our parents and herself, and she also studied at night. I received letters from my mother facilitated by the Red Cross. From those letters I learned that from the time the Russians came to Zelva, Jewish refugees streamed into Zelva from central Poland and from all the places invaded by the Nazis. They put up tents for them to live in, and when they ran out of tents, they slept out under the sky. Slowly but surely, life began to return to normal. The younger generation united with the refugees, and they lived the present as best they could, without thought for what tomorrow may bring.

In the last letter that I received from my mother, she told us that my sister Pereleh was getting ready to be married. After that, the line to our remaining dear ones in Zelva was cut, because Hitler had invaded our area, and they were destroyed in the Holocaust among the other Six Million.

May Their Memory Be Blessed!

The Competition to Open the Ark for Ne'ilah

by Chaim Slutsky

[I write this] in memory of my town, Zelva, and in memory of the beloved members of my family who were annihilated during the Second World War by Hitler and his supporters who fell upon us:

In memory of my sainted mother, Sarah, of the family of Hasia and David Rubinstein, and my father of blessed memory, Yitzhak, from the family of Rachel and Moshe Slutsky, my sister Rashka and brother-in-law, Abraham Bereshkovsky, my brother Gedalia, who, in his time, served in the Polish army and was killed in the fighting against the Germans, and similarly other uncles and aunts and their entire families. *May their memory be a blessing!*

My town Zelva, in which I was raised and where I lived until 1935, until I made *aliyah* to the Holy Land, remains in my memory as a Zionist town, in which most of the [Jewish] residents were Zionists, who donated to *Keren Kayemet* and *Keren HaYesod* for many years, and only a small percentage of them were privileged ultimately to make *aliyah* to the land of Israel.

Zelva was surrounded by fields, forests, and had the Zelvianka River, along with beautiful scenery.

The inhabitants of the town mostly made their living from manual trades: tailors, smiths, shoemakers, carpenters, wagon drivers, and farmers who grew vegetables, fruits and grain. There were also storekeepers, merchants, innkeepers, and they had a variety of occupations. They were all straightforward, honest people, who worked hard to make a living.

I am reminded of the period before the holidays. The shoemakers and tailors would work far into the night, and even arose at an early hour, continuing their work by candlelight in order to earn their bread, and they made do with limited hours of sleep and rest.

We were raised and educated during our initial years in the *Heder* of the Rebbe. After that, we went to the *Tarbut* school from the *Heder*. After graduation from the *Tarbut* school, those students who had the means went to study in other cities, and a part of us continued to study in small groups with the teachers in town, in an informal manner, because Zelva did not have a high school.

The synagogues were in the center of the town, and the cemetery was not far from there.

My father, of blessed memory, worshipped at the Great Synagogue, called the *Schule*, which contained a large and marvelous Ark that was decorated with a variety of animals and birds, each according to its own species, an outstanding work of art, literally a wonder. On the Sabbath, my brother and I would go to worship along with my father.

The custom of the synagogue is engraved into my mind: those called to the Torah on holidays used to make a donation as requested of them. In particular, I recall that in order to obtain the ark opening for the *Ne'ilah* prayer on Yom Kippur, this honor was sold to the highest bidder. My father, of blessed memory, would buy the honor of opening the ark for *Ne'ilah* year in and year out. After the other worshippers realized that my father really wanted the honor of the ark opening very much, they would compete against him, and there were times when the final price got to be a very substantial sum of money, but, to the best of my memory, I do not recall any instance where my father relented and let the honor go.

The Zelva youth was educated in the *Tarbut* school with a Zionist spirit, and after joining such organizations as *HeHalutz*, and *HaShomer HaTza'ir*, they came to recognize that there was no future for the Jewish people in the Diaspora, and sought means of exit in all sorts of places in Poland. There were those, who after many years, managed to get to the Holy Land, and because of this they were saved and remained among the living.

And thus, our little town of Zelva was erased, and not even a memory remains of it. Let my words be recorded in the *Memorial Book* for all eternity, in memory of all our loved ones who are no longer with us.

Lag B'Omer

by Aharon Freidin

The memories, experiences and adventures [of our townsfolk] have been extensively retold, however, in thinking about the townsfolk who were dear to me, and who had a part in contributing to the material in this *Memorial Book*, as I have, I will content myself with a short description of the celebration of *Lag B'Omer* as it took place in Zelva each year.

Most of the youngsters studied in Hebrew schools, and when they reached the age of 8 or 9, they joined such youth groups as *HaShomer HaTza'ir* and *Beitar*.

The joy in our hearts enveloped all of us, and we were privileged to celebrate the holiday as it was intended, in the bosom of nature, in the forest. Every aspect was celebrated in the forest.

Dressed in uniforms, we stepped through the grass together. Many of us had short shovels, that we used to dig long narrow furrows in order to set up food tables. In the center, fires were lit that were used for cooking.

The candy stores brought their wares out to the forest, and there they set up selling booths, from which were sold a variety of sweets, ice cream, cold drinks, etc.

It was an unforgettable and emotional experience of being together, and to pass by the tables that we had set up with our own hands. Our communal feast (*a Kumzitz*), to listen to the lectures of our leaders, officials and guests who came from many different places in order to spread and implant in us the precepts of Zionism and its goals and objectives. It was from them that we received news of what was taking place in the movement in the rest of Poland, and other parts of the Diaspora, and also what was happening in the Land of Israel.

During the day, several sports activities were organized, soccer, badminton and handball.

With the onset of evening, we prepared to return home, a walk of several kilometers. We were as clean and as orderly as when we started early that morning. We fell in front of our group leaders and officers in rows, and we went out across the grass following our standards, with lanterns glowing in our hands, with a song on our lips from the Holy Land and the movement.

When we reached the outskirts of our town, the fire department band waited there for us, which was all Jewish except for Schuchart, the gentile German, [sic *Volksdeutsche*] who lived in the middle of town with his family. Here we met up with the members of *HaShomer HaTza'ir*, who had crossed the field under their standard, with their lanterns, and to the music of the band, we paraded the length and breadth of the streets to the joy of its citizenry, our parents and families.

This was the crowning finale of our celebration that I will never forget.

My Life

by Yerachmiel Moorstein

At the beginning of the twentieth century, during the period of my childhood, Jews lived in significant numbers and made their living in the towns and environs around the city of Zelva. I was born at the edge of the Medukhova Forest, which was widespread, in a village home that was sunk into the earth on one side up to the windows, which was probably occupied for many generations before me. One of the wings, was occupied by my grandfather, Zvi Moorstein who was still alive, and born in 1850, along with my grandmother, Batia. From his lips, I heard many stories about his grandfather from the days of Napoleon....

We were the only Jewish family in a village of about fifty in the area, most of whom were of the Russian Orthodox faith, and the rest Polish Catholic. They were certainly not distinguished by their affection for Jews, but conducted themselves with dignity towards us, because all our menfolk were healthy, vigorous and strong. My uncle, Abraham, even was awarded a pocket watch from Czar Nicholas [II] as a prize for being a cavalry officer when he served in the army in the artillery. In addition to this, my mother was recognized as a "practical nurse," and would attend to sick people in her spare time. She could apply cups [*bahnkess*] skillfully, and in her bag, she had all manner of pills and medications... the farmers used to come to the house to solicit advice and direction from my mother, even with help in corresponding with the government. The connections with these self-same farmers existed for generations, and even in bad times, the lives of the Jews were protected.

Everyone spoke the local language - Byelorussian (White Russian). It was natural wherever possible, that we, the children, tried to speak their language, and to play with the village children, but not all of them, and not always, did they permit this, and the central reason was - we belonged to the people that had crucified Jesus...

In the First World War, the farmers hid their cattle in a corral in the forest out of fear that the soldiers would confiscate them. There were Jews who objected to taking our cattle into their corral, and because of this, we built a separate corral entirely. Large numbers of hungry soldiers passed through the area, who foraged for any sustenance they could find, and one day they came upon the tracks of the cattle, and emptied out the gentiles' corral, but they did not touch the Jewish corral. The gentile elders took this as a sign of divine retribution...

When the Russian army began to retreat, with the Germans at their heels, pandemonium broke out, and the farmers fled into the heart of Russia, and only stragglers remained behind.

The nearest Jewish family lived in a village that was about three kilometers distant from us. On [Jewish] holidays, other "neighbors" like us would go to this town, understandably on foot, in order to fulfill the obligation for community worship. I was very lucky to make part of this trip riding on my father's shoulders, and to meet with other Jewish children like me who spoke Yiddish. This was a very moving experience for all of us. I still remember one of them, Ezekiel Kaplan was his name, who emigrated with his parents to Argentina, and after several years had gone by, he wrote to me that he had become involved with newspaper publishing.

I can still hear the bright and soulful chanting of my grandfather who lead the prayers, which plucked at the heartstrings of these isolated Jewish people, who lived in the midst of this gentile populace, in an era as turbulent as the creation itself, in the midst of a brutal war that consumed victims without

number.

My father, Isaac Jacob (*Yitzhak Yaakov*) Moorstein, like his forbears, made a living from lumber. He was expert in recognizing all different kinds of trees, and those not fit to be sold for export, he would keep to build houses for the farmers, and he divided up his trade among the Jewish merchants who used to visit our home, and even spend the night with us. When they were in our area, I came to appreciate that we were not isolated, and that there were other Jews in Russia, and in other lands as well. How I would yearn to speak with these Jews to see and learn how they lived!

My mother was the daughter of Rabbi Leib Ber Vand, who was the author of about fifteen books of scholarship and tradition, and lived in Piesk, about forty kilometers from our village. She was a genuine helpmeet. She fulfilled her role as the woman of the house, the educator of her children, whom she bore every other year, with great skill and dedication. She raised us in a comprehensive Jewish spirit, and assured the fulfillment of the commandments of the Torah, and during the long winter evenings, we would sit around her and listen intently to heartfelt telling of stories about the Jews and to beautiful songs that she knew to sing in her sweet and pleasant voice.

My parents kindled in me the desire to learn. When I finally reached the tender age to start *Heder* with the *Melamed* Shlomo, I already knew how to read, and even to say my prayers. Together with my sisters, Yaffa, Zipporah and Esther, we lived with a family of our relatives in Zelva which was about seven kilometers from us. I was very lonesome for our home. On Sabbath Eve, right after school, we would set out on the dusty road to home, and after a couple of hours, we reached our warm little nest, tired, but I had found my lost treasure...

The term of study of the *Heder* was counted between the High Holidays to Passover, and was called the Period [literally: the Time]. World War I broke out during my very first school Period, and life was derailed. The orderly learning in the *Heder*, where I excelled in writing and reading, came to a halt, and I returned home to the village.

This war, which during four years claimed 20 million victims, and visited us with destruction and suffering, and brought us horrible brutality, also brought soldiers to our home, among them Jews, who served in the Russian army, and after the German occupation, their soldiers, who served in the German and Austrian armies. We even had a Jew from the Turkish army, Turkey being a member of the alliance... together with these came hordes of refugees, who were uprooted and left homeless. All of these found warmth and aid from us to the extent we could offer it, seeing as we also suffered from great want at the time. There were educated people among these, who gave of themselves and helped advance us with our education. This channel brought us books, which I read with great speed. In particular, the book *Avahat Tzion*, by Avraham Mapu made an impression on me, and its heroes, Amnon and Tamar... in Zion, the land of our forefathers! Among the refugees was a relative, Leib Lansky, who was brilliant, and he taught me Torah in generous measure. In normal times, he was a teacher at the Jewish Gymnasium in Volkovysk.

The Russians retreated, and the Germans reached their rear echelons in Russian territory. In Zelva, one of the refugees was an ardent promoter of Hebrew language, and opened a public school after obtaining his citizenship. Only six children were enrolled, and I was one of them. The teacher, who was an idealist, sunk a great deal of effort into us, and succeeded in inculcating the Hebrew language into us, and even got us ahead in our studies. Sadly, he left us after only one Period. The parents of the students, most of them poor, and blessed with many children, could not provide him with

adequate sustenance.

The Germans concerned themselves with implanting the German language, and had brought from their country, two Jewish women teachers, and in this manner, they also enlisted as a teacher, the young Dr. Jacob Sedletzky, a native of the area, and the only specialist. Students were enrolled, and for the first time, even girls were enrolled, and the school was opened, but not for long. The Germans began to falter. The cold in the Russian heartland, and the irregularity of supplies put pressure on their center. Poles began to organize brigades that planned to take control that was slipping from the hands of the Germans, and again chaos reigned. Partisans organized themselves into brigades, and they would attack and plunder what little was left.

My father, of blessed memory, was one of the many millions of victims claimed during those four years of war. My mother was left a widow with five children, the oldest of which was a thirteen year-old girl, without any sources of livelihood or sustenance. The isolation and fear of remaining in the village among the gentiles impelled us to uproot ourselves and leave, after hundreds of years, and certainly forever, the house that I lived in until I reached Bar Mitzvah age. No more to have the surroundings of nature, the green fields bounded by the wide forest, enveloped in mystery which stirred both curiosity and thought... there is a heart tug and an longing, even after seventy years of my life... we moved to the nearby town, Zelva, which was an administrative hub that had a population of about two thousand, among which there were several hundred Christians. We lived in a small, low house on a narrow street, full of mud during winter season, and in the summer - clouds of dust from the passing of cattle herds to and from the meadow... but at least we were living amongst Jews! The Jews here conducted a full community life. In the *Schule Hauf* was the center of the synagogues, and I found much substance and interest there. In the *Bet Hamidrash* of the synagogues, two prayer minyans were conducted each morning. Between *Mincha* and *Maariv*, we also heard a lesson in *Mishna* from one of the scholars. I would attend worship with regularity, and resolved not to miss any prayers. I was observant of all commandments whether they be light or onerous. I found friends here that matched my temperament, and no longer felt isolated, yet still, I was an orphan... there is no one to watch over you, no one to be concerned about your welfare, here you are leading a very insecure existence... my mother wanted to see a change in me to become the man of the house, and on the night of the Seder, it was my role to act as head of the family. But the repast was meager, and damp with tears, as I conducted the ritual as it says in the *Haggadah*, in accordance with tradition, but it enervated us. We struggled mightily not to have to accept the public charity available through *Maot Hittin*, and we prevailed. To my mother and dear sisters I was a symbol of hope, that someday in the future I would become famous!!! I genuinely wanted to help them already, but really, how?...In Zelva there were three *Heders* for pupils, and there they learned Torah, reading, writing and arithmetic. But what after that?

And there were *Yeshivah* students who came from faraway places to study in the *Bet Hamidrash*, and also local youths, who obtained learning from self-teaching with the use of books. I, and several other pupils, used to get an "hour" from one of these young men, generally twice a week, in order to accelerate our learning, but even the very meager cost of these lessons was a heavy burden for me...

This was a very difficult period. The Jews, especially the merchants, became progressively impoverished. Without a place to learn, and with no gainful employment, the youth of the town became idle. The outgrowth of this distressed situation was the establishment of branches of organizations, mostly Zionist, but also the *Bund* and communists. There were young men who were

drawn to communist ideology, and gave their ideals substance by going over to the Soviet Union.

Despite all the tribulations of the time, our home was a happy home, full of things to do. From our house, one always could hear the sound of music, song and dancing. I learned to play the violin. All my sisters had beautiful voices. Faigel was a beautiful girl, and she helped my mother with the housework. Esther was a seamstress, a soulful singer, dancer and actress. Batia was also a seamstress, and could express herself beautifully in Hebrew. Sarah completed the syllabus of study at the *Tarbut* school, and studied further for six years at the *Tarbut* in Vilna, and graduated with excellence, after which she became the principal of a school in Slonim.

Feverishly, I threw myself into studies and Zionist organizations. I acquired knowledge from independent book study, and also learned bookkeeping, and continued to play the violin. The land of Israel - Palestine then appeared very distant indeed, but the yearning to reach and live there implanted in us an agenda for the future...

Together with several companions, we created out of nothing - a library, and in the library we had a catalogue of thousands of volumes. We organized the books in which were laid the foundations for the *Tarbut* Hebrew School. The school was not established in time for my sister Zipporah and I to take advantage of it, but the rest of my sisters were educated there.

And so, I grew up, I worked in a sawmill in Slonim for three years, and after that in Pinsk for four years as the director of a Jewish agricultural cooperative founded by the J.K.A. and ORT, and I even participated as a representative of my country to Warsaw under the authority of Singlovisk in 1933.

In the Pinsk [Memorial] Book, volume II p. 576, some of my writing can be found about the cooperative.

After a year, I married Hannah Dolinko. Her parents perished in the Holocaust. Their daughter Liza, may she rest in peace, passed away in the Holy Land. Her sons, Shalom and Daniel, and her daughter, Bruria, live in our land. The rest of this family emigrated, among them the Meltzer family, and they live in the United States. They are committed Zionists, and make substantial contributions to finance all manner of needs in our land.

We went to the Holy Land in 1935. We reached the port of Jaffa in Palestine-Israel at sunset, and were welcomed in Hebrew, and I felt that I had finally reached the homeland that I longed for, and there was no one more fortunate than I !!!

The British still ruled the land, and the Arabs were beginning to organize themselves to oppose our immigration. Bloody clashes broke out, and the Arabs used their arms to attack Jewish settlements, and the British constabulary didn't restrain them, but the Haganah stood in the breach and gave back a good account of itself. We had dead and wounded, among them myself. I was taken to the Hadassah Hospital, where I was kept for about two months, but I left there healthy and in one piece. From that time on, I participated in different capacities in the many wars of Israel. Even to this day, I am active in the central committee of the Haganah veterans in the Dan branch.

As a Zionist from early childhood, I am fortunate in having done my part in the realization of Zionist goals, and in the establishment of the Land of Israel from the time of my arrival, even before my Jubilee year which draws near. I discharged all my obligations to my beloved homeland under difficult

circumstances, several times at great risk to life and limb, and here I am, exultant and proud at having attained this !!! The eternity of Israel is no lie !!!

In the *Encyclopedia of the Pioneers of the Settlements and its Builders*, by David Tadhar, in volume XIX, page 5674, there is a summary of my work.

I brought a blessed family into the world. After our arrival, we had a daughter, Nitzah. Two years later - Aviah. When the terrifying news reached us that our loved ones were annihilated and destroyed by the Nazis and their accomplices, and that no trace remained of the families that were related to us in Zelva, and that only I and Hannah, and my sister Batia remained who could preserve, carry on and fill out the family to help populate the nation, the responsible reply was:

We had a son, Jacob, and after him a daughter, Dorit.

Nitzah and [her husband] Ernest-Raphael are both outstanding physicians, and they have a daughter Ruth and two sons, Yair and Joab.

Aviah has a daughter named Ephrat.

Jacob and Nitzah have a son named Itai, and a daughter named Adinah.

Dorit and Ilan have the daughters, Inbal and Reut, and a son, Ohad.

My sister, who is the widow of Meir Feinstein, who was killed on the Jerusalem road in 1948, has a daughter, Shafirah, and with her husband, Yitzhak Fuchs, has two daughters, Liat and Shiri. The children of my sister's late daughter Sarah, of blessed memory, are Orit, Michal and Paz. Their father is David Hirschman.

I am one of the last ones, who lived during the period of the Holocaust, a witness to the uprooting and annihilation of all the beloved people of the community of Zelva, and among them, my mother, Shifra, my sister Sarah Moorstein, my sister Feigel and her husband Moshe Gerber, their son, Yitzhak and their daughter Jaffa, my sister Esther, her husband Joseph Freidin, their son Yitzhak and their daughter Atarah, my aunt Freidel and Leib Bereshkovsky, their son, Shmuel Zalman and his wife Liza from the Gelman family, and their three children, Jacob and his wife Resha and their three children, Yitzhak and his wife Rachel from the Becker family and their three children, Abraham and his wife Rasha of the Slutsky family, Lieber, Moshe and Zevulun, and also the daughter, Sarah, married to Leib Vishnivitzky and their four children. My aunt Leah and her husband Zvi Selman and their children: Zalman, Yitzhak, Benjamin, Leib and Batia.

Joseph ben David and Bashka Moorstein (their children live with us in Israel - Sarah and Nurit, Joseph and Dorit), their son David, and their daughters, Havivah and Esther, and also our relatives in related branches of the family. All were vigorous, intelligent people, and an asset to their people. I am discharging some form of universal obligation by having their names permanently inscribed in this *Memorial Book*, along with the brutal events that cut them off from us, so that succeeding generations will remember them and will never forget, and will continue with the preservation and strengthening of our people and nationhood!!!

My uncle, Eliezer Moorstein, was active in the revolt against the Czar in 1905. He was released from prison, an act facilitated by a bribe provided by my father Jacob, and whisked out of the country to the United States. He was followed, after a few years, by his brother Chaim, and after him, Abraham, after having served in the Czar's army, which earned him the watch as a prize for his distinguished role as a cavalry officer in the artillery. They reached the well-endowed land of freedom, America,

and they were a mainstay to their aging father and to the remainder of their family during World War I with their support, sending necessities (and who didn't?...), packages and dollars at a time when even they didn't have very much...

I also am obligated to record the efforts exerted by Zelva natives whose commitment to the Jewish people manifested itself in all sorts of ways. In the August 1971 edition of *Ma'arachot*, the publication of a book, entitled, "The Pledge" (*Ha-Ne'Emanim*) was publicized, in English and in Hebrew translation, and it was dedicated to my uncle, Eliezer. The book was written by the author Leonard Salter, my nephew, and according to the table of contents, it contains a unique chapter that only at the last brought to light an important fact: the activity of in the United States regarding the [Israeli] War of Independence and its conduct.

This may have been the first time since the Bar Kochba rebellion that the Jewish people were called upon to help their brethren not only with philanthropy, but with the provision of armaments: rifles, cannon, boats and planes.

The Jews of America were unfazed by either danger or difficulty when it came to helping Israel in its momentous hour of need, and it was a "finest hour" for many of them as well.

During the War of Independence, when we were in dire need of arms beside Sten guns and the *Davidka*, my uncle Eliezer, this outstanding Jew, endangered himself personally, in addition to the substantial funds he provided, and provided us with very valuable resources. The leaders of the Haganah, among them Golda Meir and Yigal Allon, used to come to his home, which served as a critical staging point for shipment from his warehouses in the port of San Diego in California.

My uncle Eliezer's children are:

A daughter, Beattie and her husband Leonard Salter, both writers.

Their daughters Lucy and Amy.

A son, Richard, may he rest in peace, who was an economist and a presidential advisor in the United States, and a granddaughter, Karen.

My uncle Chaim's children are:

A daughter, Frances, and her husband, David Zwanziger, their daughter, Eve.

A son, Daniel, a physicist, who spent a year at the Weizmann Institute.

A daughter, Rena, and her husband, Sy Goldsmith, their son Gary, a physician.

My uncle Abraham's children are:

Benjamin, a psychiatrist, his sons in academia: Bruce, Mark and Ronnie.

Harry is an accountant, his wife is Sylvia, their children, Deborah and Barton.

Here, therefore are these good Jewish people, who were compelled to flee the land where their fathers and forefathers lived for many generations before them, who left and regrouped themselves in America, a land that took them in, and gave them the opportunity to develop themselves in many fields of endeavor. This took place before Our Land was in any condition to attract them. They were

a mainstay to the Jews who stayed behind in Europe, the inheritors of suffering after the Wars. Their help manifested itself in many different ways. I can still remember the communal kitchens that were opened in 1917 that infused life into otherwise dried out bones...

As of today, their children continue their posture, with all respect, to be committed with all their means in supporting and strengthening the development of our country!!!

Zelva, My Village

by Joseph Slutsky, Melbourne, Australia
(Original translation from
Yiddish to Hebrew by Y. Moorstein)

This was my village, full of life, in which I spent my youth, and now it no longer exists. Zelva was well-known in the entire area, and it stood out for its love of Israel and yearnings for messianic redemption. It bubbled with vitality, and was full of romantic beauty, having on one side the Zelvianka river, in whose cool waters we would bathe in the summertime, and on whose ice we would skate in the winter, and on the Sabbath and festivals, couples and the rest of the townsfolk would stroll along the *Haufgasse*.

Zelva did not produce academically trained people because of the economic circumstances which prevented the young people from continuing with studies and the acquisition of advanced learning, but this same youth excelled in self-learning, the proof of which - in Zelva there were two Hebrew schools: *Tarbut*, and *Tachkemoni*. Zelva youth read a great deal, and participated in all aspects of Jewish life.

The village was Zionist. There were organizations, branches, a drama club, there were debates held on political and cultural subjects, in which the better speakers and lecturers from Warsaw and the area would come and address filled halls.

I was active in the Revisionist organization. I remember the visit of Dr. Lipman from the central office in Warsaw. After his lecture, in the middle of my ride with him to the train station in the wagon of *Velveleh Tatkeh's*, he said to me that of all the towns and villages in the area, Zelva was truly one of a kind. He then turned his attention to the remarks of the wagon driver who expressed the following thought: "Everyone wants to elevate and improve mankind. It would be better if they improved the quality of these roads, so it would be easier for my horses to pull the wagon." Dr. Lipman said at that point that he would adopt the very practical notion of this otherwise simple, uneducated man.

During the famous market fairs, pickpockets would come even from as far away as Warsaw. In 1939, about two months before the *Great Deluge*... I left the village, and I remember Hitler's (may his name be erased) historic speech on Czechoslovakia. I met up with Leib Spector, of blessed memory, whom I thought to be an intelligent Jewish man. He told me that in his opinion there would be no war, and if there was a war, that even Hitler couldn't overpower three and a half million Jews. To our great pain and sorrow, he was proved wrong.

Only one Jew sounded an alarm: [Vladimir] Ze'ev Jabotinsky. To me, he continues to be a guiding

light even in ordinary matters of living.

After the war, when it became clear that the Jews of Poland were exterminated, I tried to bring several families that remained in Russia to Australia: Spector, Hertz [Herzel] Borodetzky, and Anka Borodetzky.

WE BOW OUR HEADS IN MEMORY OF OUR MARTYRS !!!

Eating "Days"

by Yerachmiel Moorstein

"And you will drink water sparingly - and you will eat meager bread"

The desire to learn and acquire knowledge gave no rest, but how was one to accomplish this? The First World War is at its height, and the educational "institutions" of the town are continuing to dispense learning, but at a sparing rate. Some *heders* for pupils are opening up, but they are just for the first 2-3 years of instruction. In order to progress, it was necessary to travel to a place of learning. The county seat was about 20 kilometers away, and there was a *Talmud Torah* there, an educational establishment, in the absence of a *Yeshivah*, where learning was dispensed, and where the *Talmud* was taught to students who showed ability to progress. My parents decided that this was the proper place for their only son.

And that is how I reached the city of Volkovysk, in my eyes as one young and untried, sent to my relatives, who lived in a stone house, whose walls were thick and sunk into the ground up to the windows, and where drops of moisture dripped like sweat from the ceiling, and it is late in the fall, and the rain outside penetrates to the bone.

The father of the house, a good-hearted Jewish man, was a whitewasher by occupation, and from this time until Purim - he was idle. He tried to make me as comfortable as possible while I lived with them, and he prepared some fresh straw for me on a bench and sofa, the only one not occupied in the house, and over this they spread a large flaxen spread; a coverlet, thin from great use, which served as my blanket, and on top of that, my outer clothing, and under all of this, I didn't fall asleep very easily...

The woman of the house, who was our family relative, the mother of five children, the oldest of which was bar-mitzvah age, tried to help me, but with what?

This family had great difficulty in providing clothing and cover for its own children, and the same for the meager food they had, thus my own sustenance depended on the "days," that were promised to me by donating families, who were also related, that invited me to come and dine each day at a different household which offered such a donation [this practice was known as *essen teg* in Yiddish, literally translated as "eating days" -JSB]

After I became resigned to my fate, I was very depressed, frightened by each leaf that blew at me, lacking security, and with very few kopecks in my pocket. I went to bed. The night was very long, until I would get up in the morning, and go to the home that had committed to feed me breakfast that day, and also lunch.

Feeling insecure and sad, I would wend my way to find my appointed place, and when I would see it in the narrow lane, by weak light according to the description that I had, I would knock softly on the door, and a boy would open it, and indicate that I should sit next to another boy, who had already arrived and sat at the table.

The boys who were inured to this way of life were spiritually strong, because they were *Yeshivah* boys. They had finished the *Talmud Torah*, and because of houses like these, they were continuing with their studies independently, and felt adequately unburdened.

After several routine questions, such as my name, where I came from, my relationship to this family, which I could only explain with great difficulty, they started to cough, and urged me to join in. I started to, but quietly, and they yelled at me, "louder!" The purpose of the coughing was to waken the woman of the house. As it turned out, this donor had left to go to the bakery, and when she came back and opened the door, I quietly stole out and headed for the *Bet Hamidrash*, my study place.

Sad, hungry, and feeling scrawny, I started to study after a silent morning prayer. I had to absorb the first lesson, but understandably with great difficulty.

I didn't recognize a single other student there. There were those among them who were abusive to me, because they were bigger than I was, and one of them even said: "what's a pipsqueak like this doing in our class?" I choked back tears in my throat, and at our first recess I went out to the *Schulhauf* to find something to eat, and in one of the corners I found a woman sitting cross-legged, having a heavy metal pot under which were hot coals, and next to her another pot that was well covered, and she sold a sort of baked item, made from spelt wheat, not of the best kind, fried in oil, and crescent-shaped, weighing about what you would anticipate. I took the coin requested from my pocket to pay for one, I ate it and ... I was satisfied. For a long time after this "meal," I drank only water, but I remembered the taste for many days...

News and stories started to reach us of further stirrings that were going on. The Poles were setting up legions for an army of liberation in order to re-establish their national sovereignty.

My mother boarded a wagon used to transport merchandise, and after considerable difficulties, she reached me in order to bring me home. She was positively shaken by my weakened and stunted appearance, and it was probably only her prayers, the prayers of a caring mother, that reached the right place.

And yet, here, the story is before us.

Before the Holocaust, several Jewish newspapers were published in Warsaw. In one of them, *Heint* [Today], a column appeared called *News from Zelva*.

On one Sabbath, in connection with *Mizrachi* matters, Mr. Rabinowitz, an official of the central *Mizrachi* office, visited us (as was described in the reports) for the purpose of organizing a *Mizrachi* branch in Zelva.

In front of a gathering at the *Bet Hamidrash*, the guest outlined the goals of the *Mizrachi* organization.

The work of this organization, to involve the participation of religious Jews in the building of the land of Israel, was received graciously even by those who were not *Mizrachi* sympathizers, but it appeared that the speaker had other intentions. In his lecture, he accused the other schools of educating their pupils for ... conversion from their faith, and he argued that their students were simply ignorant. This irresponsible representation of their character stirred up a lot of bitterness among those involved with the *Tarbut* school, who then decided to oppose this association [with *Mizrachi*], because instead of coming to praise, he had come to severely criticize.

A special event was precipitated by the visit of Eliezer Futritzky² who visited us from Jerusalem, and who took the lead in directing a Hebrew play put on by *HaShomer HaTza'ir*. Until that time, Hebrew plays were only put on by children. This time, the young people prepared the historical drama based on the life of the Hasmonean prince, Eliezer ben Yehuda.

Mr. Eliezer Futritzky has served in this capacity in Jerusalem for the prior two years with great success, according to the review of this production that had appeared in the newspaper *Doar HaYom*, vol. 75, 30 December 1927. This was the source of the considerable interest in this play in Zelva.

[Also], The drama club of *Poalei Zion* put on the play, *Der Groiser Moment*, under the direction of Y. Zalman. Proceeds were used for the benefit of the fire department of Zelva.

Tuvia Vishnivisky, Esther Moorstein and Yedidia Shveysky gave outstanding performances in this play.

The *Tarbut* Library, which did not grow because of lack of consensus among the school leadership, received a great boost from the appointment of Mr. Garbovnick, a teacher at the *Tarbut* school, as Librarian, and thanks to his efforts, the library was re-established and came to contain about 1000 volumes in Yiddish and Hebrew.

² Eliezer Futritzky comes from our town [Zelva], Eliezer Ritz. was among the founders of the electricity companies in Israel. He passed away in Haifa, His widow is Manya, his daughter - Maxima [Neutra], his son - Odded (see also *The Freidins of Zelva* later in this volume).

The Lady Storekeeper and Her Scholar-Husband

by Yerachmiel Moorstein

Feiga was the sole heir of the store, since she was an only daughter. From early childhood on, she participated in the sale of kerchiefs to the farm wives, and she succeeded in this, gaining control over her business, getting ahead in business, and she did very well, and most of the kerchief inventory on the store shelves was her property, free of debt or any other encumbrances.

In time, Feiga grew older, and she was left without anyone to help her or to give her support. Well-meaning people seeking to do good, reached into the woodwork, and married her off to a *Yeshivah* student, Yankel Velfer, who for years had spent his life in the *Bet Hamidrash*. His calling was the study of the Torah. He was thoroughly grounded in the *Shas* [the Six Orders of the Talmud] and all its related commentaries. He paid no attention to practical worldly matters. His central concern was to observe the 613 commandments, the casual ones with as much zealousness as the serious ones, and to arrive at a world that was all good, he was a pure soul... short and thin. The charitable women who looked after his diet apparently didn't overfeed him...

Even after their marriage, Feiga ran the kerchief store without his help. The year-round conduct of business in *Zelva* permitted Yankel to continue to remain in the *Bet Hamidrash*, and to delve further into scholarship and *Talmud*, to pray, and between *Mincha* and *Maariv* to give a lesson in *Ein Yaakov* to a coterie of listeners. But when it came time for the fairs, and business activity rose considerably, then Yankel had to stop his study of Torah, and he was compelled to help Feiga with selling kerchiefs. When it came to prices and colors, he was totally lost, and he only spoke a few words of the local language, and when a farmer's wife would ask him for a green kerchief, he would give her a red one, and if she stood her ground and demanded a green one, he would answer her in the language of the *Gemara* with its accompanying intonation, *Mai Nafka Minah?* or as if to say: "what's the difference? this is a kerchief and *this too* is a kerchief..."

The Baal Tefilah

by Yerachmiel Moorstein

There was a cantor in the town and for the High Holidays, he also formed a choir despite the fact that *aliyah* claimed one of the grown up singers, but the appearance of the cantor before a full house was generally reserved for the Great Synagogue, since it had the greatest seating capacity and because the acoustics were best there. Accordingly, there was little air left to breathe, because on all the holidays, the place would get so filled up that there was no room left.

In addition to the cantor, there were several Jews who were capable of leading prayers as a *Baal Tefilah*, and to convey the sentiments of the congregation to the Almighty. The most venerable and popular of these was Yershel Boyarsky (the investigator), whose deep and pleasant voice would tug at the heartstrings of the worshippers. To hear him pour his feelings into prayers such as *Unsaneh Tokef* on Rosh Hashanah, or *P'tach Sha'arei Shamayim* during the *Ne'ilah* service on Yom Kippur, all the Jews would stream to the *Da'atz Bet Hamidrash*, where he served as cantor, and in a wondrous silence would listen attentively to his prayers - his entreaties to the Creator of the Universe.

Yershel served as a cantor only for holidays, since he spent most of his time as an overseer in the

forests, being an expert in wood and lumber, and there were many times when he didn't have the opportunity to be home. But there were slack seasons when he was not working, and probably because he was not earning a living, he made an impression on the Heavenly Dweller with his voice, and on the praying congregation, especially the women, would gather to hear his clear and pure prayer, greeting it with sighing and tears.

The Model of Conduct in Zelva - Bubbeh Laskeh

by Yerachmiel Moorstein

It is difficult to conceive that the Jewish people could have survived in every nook and cranny of the world, facing all the tribulations that they did, if it weren't for the volunteers among them, who dedicated themselves to helping those who were in need. There wasn't a corner of Jewish life in which these people didn't appear and perform their service.

Among these, I raise the memory of one of the role models of charitable work in our town Zelva, Laskeh Freidin, of blessed memory, called by her grandchildren in Israel *Bubbeh Laskeh*.

In our country, we have socialist foundations, with welfare offices, headed by a minister with a staff that administers a large budget, and oversees all the requirements of the needy for support and assistance. Thousands of social workers work in these foundations, managers of special offices, and departments, who disburse lots of funds to the applicants, and occasionally, it comes to light that the recipient of the funds has no business being there... and so starts the conversation of where is the boundary between someone with means, and someone without means. Today, we have a concept called the "poverty line." Someone who is guaranteed food and clothing is not below that line, but not every recipient of these funds appears to be satisfied with this. According to his reasoning, he is "entitled" to more, and he will sometimes demand this quite vehemently...

In Zelva, bread never got thrown into the garbage... if it was even available on the table in the house. Only the well-to-do in town baked challah for the Sabbath.

Among our obligation to those who come after us, is to describe how life was conducted in our communities, despite the lack of wealth, overburdened with population, and blessed with an abundance of children, without a ministry of welfare and support, and without a single salaried social worker.

Zelva is counted among such towns. It is understood that here too, there were paupers. Most preferred to go hungry rather than accept charity, but there were difficult days for those starving for a piece of bread, and it was these that the Bubbeh Laskeh looked after as a volunteer (social worker), and did all the functions of these many "foundations."

In the First World War, when the Germans ruled for about four years, a typhus epidemic broke out, which caused many deaths, and not all the soldiers returned from the battlefield either, leaving widows burdened with the care of orphans. The blessed efforts of Laskeh eased and helped the suffering of the needy a great deal. Despite her advanced age, she would take to her feet in all sorts of weather, visiting the houses of the well-to-do, who would fill her sacks with all sorts of life's necessities, which she would then distribute to those who were in need.

As to her own modest needs, these were provided for by her son, Yitzhak [Itchkeh] Freidin, who with his blessed family made *aliyah* to the Holy Land, and he passed away here. *May Her Soul Be Bound Up In The Bond Of Life.*

The Departure From Zelva
(Diary Excerpts)

by Eliezer Futritzky (Ritz)

[8 March 1926]

In another two days, I am leaving the town of my birth...

In another 48 hours I will no longer see my mother and the beloved members of my family, I will not see the tombstones of my father, brother and grandfather³...in another 48 hours I will no longer see the ambience in which I was educated, in which I was raised, and where I lived for twenty-eight years...

All, all these, with whom I lived with for twenty-eight years, in another twenty-four hours it will be as if they never existed...

Even though I don't fear the moment, I nonetheless feel a weight on my heart, and in addition, the question weighs on me, how will I take leave of my frail mother, how will those moments pass... *that* is what I fear.

Even though the house is ever so dear to me, I cannot allow myself to be found within it, I will not be able to bear my mother's damp eyes... I will not be able to sleep in my own bed, when my elderly grandmother will rise from her bed to sit in front of me and cry. I want to be able to scrutinize her face with care, so I will not forget her...

I want to run away, to run away from all of them and not to see a single one of them, not to speak, but rather to wander the backstreets of the town, to run to those places where my feet walked, to kiss the dust of the ground, to leave them, for these are the places where I spent the days of my youth.

How will I be able to take leave of you, from all of you whom I love and hold so dear, how will I be able to exchange you, my town and all who are dear to me, for the staff of the wanderer!?

But from the depths of my soul, a voice bursts out of me like a clap of thunder:

"Eliezer, Eliezer, how can you think such thoughts!? You are travelling to the Land of Israel!!! In just a little while, you will arrive in the land of your origins! Look, here you have nothing that belongs to you. Everything - everything - belongs to them, THEM..."

Slowly, slowly the weight passes...

Nonetheless, how strange it is: for over two years, I dedicated myself body and soul to the Zionist ideal, I spent days and nights in the offices of the Zionist *Histadrut*, the *Keren Kayemet L'Yisrael*, and the *Keren HaYesod*, and here, when the hour finally arrives, and I, myself, am ready to go to the Holy Land that I aspired to, there is the pressure of such a weight on my heart!? Despite this...

³ Here, Lou Ritz refers to his father, David, his brother, Moshe Beryl, and grandfather Jacob (the *Dayan*), who died in the great influenza epidemic of 1919. See *The Freidins of Zelva* elsewhere in this volume.

I was invited to a going-away party by my friends tonight at eight, and again a weight begins to press on my heart. Will this be the last evening in which I will find myself in intimate contact with my friends? How will I feel?

In the company of my close friend Moshe'l, I came at eight o'clock to the place the party was being held (at the home of Yarnivsky). Everyone was seated around the table. It looks like they were all waiting for me to arrive. My heart is beating furiously. *Is this the last time?* But there is no time to think, and they start the festivities.

At the party are my girl friends: Tzipah, Batia, Dina'tchah and Leah, and my boy friends: Moshe'l, Moshe Mordechai, Shmuel, Zelig, Lipik from Volkovysk, and Yerachmiel.

I felt great at the party, you might even say, terrific, I practically didn't feel that the entire to-do was in honor of me. If it weren't for the occasional congratulations and best wishes that were offered to me, I would have thought that I was at a going-away party for one of my other friends...

But before the party was over, I no longer had any doubts, and I felt only too well, that it was me who was going to depart, and I am going to be separated from all my dear ones. I felt that I was the one who was leaving, and they are staying behind. They will go on with their lives, in the same surroundings, and I am taking up the walking stick of the wanderer in my hand, and I begin to wander in the outside world, so different from the world in which they live. They will continue their lives in the same phase that we all lived in, and I am passing into a completely different phase, and in my soul, a sort of feeling of jealousy towards them stirs.

They will yet continue to live at home with their parents, enjoying their beds that their mothers prepared for them, and I, the youngest among them, will be lonely, forsaken, without a relative and without someone to rescue me. Far, far from my family will I go...

And once again that inner voice thunders at me:

"Eliezer, Eliezer, you are travelling to the Land of Israel!"

That voice truly takes care of everything, but yet...

I part from my friends in high spirits, and accompanied by my friend Moshe'l, I return to my home. We enter the yard of the house. It is silent, all are asleep, the lights are out... and it appears to me that I am surrounded by everything in my neighborhood: the houses, the yard, the trees - everything, everything is whispering, talking about me and my forthcoming trip. It appears to me that each and every thing says to me:

"Take our last blessings. For you see us now for the last time! For you see, we are parting now! We are parting, and who knows, perhaps for ever and ever. Take our last blessings. Look! Look again! Don't forget our shapes and what we looked like!..."

And it appears to me that even the moon in the heavens speaks to me and whispers: *"Oh, you poor wretch, you poor wretch! It is still night, and you will be here for only one more night!"*

And my heart contracts from so much pain.

At the sound of my knock, my mother comes down, opens the door and lights a candle. I try very hard not to look at her face, which conveys such a deep sadness, but is this not my mother, my dear mother, who worked so hard on my behalf. My mother, who suffered so much from me until she managed to raise me, and I want to run to her, to fall into her embrace, to hug and kiss her, saying: "*Oh, my mother, my mother!*"

I lift my eyes and I see my mother standing on the threshold of the bedroom door, her head bowed low and crying, and when she spied me looking at her, she heaved a deep sigh and went to sleep. Understandably, she didn't sleep, and neither did I.

All the images pass before my eyes, to irritate me they stand before me and do not move from their place. I try to force them away, I try to fall asleep, but to no avail. Only with the coming of daybreak do I fall fitfully asleep...

9 March 1926

When I awoke it was late already, and the clock rang at nine. I dressed hurriedly, and went outside. Under no circumstances can I stand to stay in the house despite the fact that it is so dear to me...

Where to go - I don't really know, I walk slowly at the side of the street, and I think. The people coming and going look and stare at me, but I, I do not want to look at anyone...

Two friends interrupt my thoughts. Two friends from the *Keren Kayemet L'Yisrael* came up to me and advised me that in the evening at eight thirty, the Zionist *Histadrut*, and its affiliate organizations, were throwing a going-away party in my honor. All the members of the various organizations in which I was active were to participate in the party. I thanked them, and parted from them.

I rushed to the *Beit Am*, where the offices of the Zionist *Histadrut* and its affiliates were located. Even if I had only one day left in Zelva, I still had work to do in the offices of the Zionist *Histadrut*. It is difficult, very difficult to leave them behind. For about two years now, I have spent my time, all my days here, in these offices. I got up and worked here days and nights while my friends spent their time at leisure. I would be separated from them, stuck in between the damp walls of the *Beit Am* doing my "international work" there. At times, when I was in a bad mood, it was this work that diverted my mind from all cares. And when questions of "purpose" would start boring into my mind, I would always go running to the office, and there I would forget everything.

Today I am finishing the completion of the minutes of the international affiliates for which I served as the head secretary, and I am preparing to turn them over to other secretaries.

This is a gloomy day for me, because it is oh, so difficult for me to depart. I have but one comfort in my heart: I am leaving all this for a different work: the building of the Holy Land. It is practically waiting for me. My goal is the Land of Israel, and in that I take comfort...

At ten in the morning, I turned over in the presence of the director of the Zionist *Histadrut*, comrade Chaim Yitzhak Lev, the minutes of the Zionist organization to the new secretary, comrade Aharon Rotni.

At eleven in the morning, I turned over, in the presence of the director of the *Keren Kayemet*

L'Yisrael, comrade Z. Helman, the minutes and principal files and all the material to the newly elected secretary, comrade Shmuel Yarnivsky.

At noon, I turned over the minutes of the *Keren HaYesod* to the honorary secretary, comrade Rosenbloom.

At four in the afternoon, I turned over, in the presence of the director of the *Eretz Yisrael* office, comrade Rosenbloom, the minutes of the office of the *Eretz Yisrael* organization, to the newly elected secretary, comrade Nahum (Nathan) Helman.

In this fashion, I turned over all the minutes, and I returned home like it was after a funeral...

9 March 1926 Evening

The last evening and night of my presence in Zelva have arrived.

The sun has gone down behind the mountains, and the night is drawing near. Hundreds, hundreds of questions, for which there are no answers, begin to gnaw at my mind. The sadness, worry, and fear, spread their control over my heart, and as much as I try to shake them off, I do not succeed...

Master of the Universe! Is this real, or just a dream?!

Is it true that this evening is my last evening in Zelva? Is tomorrow's evening already part of a set different from the ones in which I had spent my first twenty-eight years?! Does tomorrow's evening belong to a new period in my life?... *"Oh, you moon in the sky - stop! Don't you dare to distance yourself from me! Don't pass by so swiftly! This night, it is incumbent upon me to speak and whisper about great and wonderful things... oh, evening, evening, if you could only extend for twenty-four hours... forty-eight... more... and more... how fortunate I would be!"*

I won't be able to completely drink in my surroundings, I won't be able to finish my conversations, the evening will pass, day will come, and at ten o'clock at night, I will leave my home town, leave my mother and the members of my family, my surroundings, my friends, and alone and forsaken... lonely...with the wanderer's staff in my hand...

And suddenly a voice is heard:

"Eliezer! Eliezer! No! No! No! You won't be wretched and forsaken! You won't be abandoned! There is no one forsaken in the land of Israel! In the settlements and kibbutzim in Israel there is no sadness!!! You will be happy, joyous and radiant, but only in the Land of Israel! You will work at your work, and you will speak your language, you will sing your songs, you will dance your dances, but only in the Land of Israel, and only for the Land of Israel."

Here I was daydreaming... about life in the Holy Land.

The clock rang eight... and I recalled that I had to go to the party. I put on my overcoat and I go out. It is dark outside. The sound of the raindrops stopped my daydreaming. Here I am, walking along slowly, lost deep in my thoughts, without sensing that I had reached the auditorium. I can't go in...

the sound of song comes at me from the auditorium, but I can't go in. They have come together, singing and happy... but it is I who is to depart... and they... will remain. Tomorrow, they will escort me to the train, they will go back to town together, and even then they will sing as well... and I? - I will sit in a corner in one of the train cars, and I will dream...

"Eliezer! Eliezer! They are jealous of you, because you are the fortunate one, that it fell to you, that it was your lot to make aliyah to the Land of Israel. They envy you, that it fell to you to be among the fortunate ones, to work here on behalf of the Land of Israel, and to work in the land of Israel... all those who have gathered here wait with great impatience for the hour to come when they will also be able to make aliyah. In the hour when you take leave of the bitter Diaspora to go to the Land of your Fulfillment, they have to stay behind in the Diaspora, and in that hour do you envy them? - why, and what for? Why did you work so hard and dedicate yourself all your life, and why were you drawn to the Zionist ideal? Why did you work so hard for the benefit of all the Zionist foundations? Did you not yearn every day, and each minute for this hour to arrive?"

I breathed deeply, and felt lighter, the heaviness on my heart went away... I entered the auditorium to loud cries of "Hurrah!"- Here is the Guest of Honor!!!

The preparations for opening the celebration were complete. We were waiting only for the arrival of the director of the local *Tarbut* branch, comrade Rosenbloom. After a few minutes, he arrived.

Participating in the celebration were:

Representing

<i>Zionist Histadrut</i>	The Director, Chaim Yitzhak Lev, and the Treasurer, Aharon Rotni.
<i>Keren HaYesod</i>	The Honorary Secretary, Chaim Rosenbloom.
<i>Keren Kayemet</i>	The Executive Committee: the Director, Nahum [Nathan] Helman, the Assistant Director, Shammai Kaplan, and the Treasurer, Shimshon Levine. Charity box distribution: The appointee, Mordechai Perlmutter, the Secretary, Moshe Rafilovitz, and the chapter membership: Moshe Slutsky, Yerachmiel Moorstein, Shmuel Yarnivsky, Rachel Buchhalter, Itkeh Schrifitger, and Esther Shtureikovitz.
<i>Eretz Yisrael Office</i>	Comrade Jacob Rotni.
<i>Tarbut Chapter</i>	The Director, Chaim Rosenbloom.
The Teachers Association of the <i>Tarbut</i> School	Shmuel Freidin, Shabtai Ratner, and Akiva Shveysky.

Tarbut Library

Comrade Elchanan Potztiveh.

HeHalutz

Ezekiel Halpern.

And in a similar fashion, my brother Mordechai [Max] was invited.

The party opened with the singing of *Hatikvah*. As master of ceremonies for the party, they had selected the Director of the *Tarbut* branch and the *Eretz Yisrael Office*, Chaim Rosenbloom. Director Rosenbloom suggests that the opening remarks be given by Shmuel Freidin from the Teacher's Association of the local school, I being among the first of those educated at the local Hebrew school to make *aliyah* to the Land of Israel. All those seated agree with the suggestion of the Director, and my favorite [Hebrew] teacher, Shmuel Freidin accepts this first undertaking. He dwells especially on the needs of young Jewish people in general, and on the needs of school graduates in particular, that youth which stands at the crossroads, seeking the right way to go. Shall the youth turn to Zionism as a solution to the question? And afterwards, he speaks about me, and he holds up as an example my participation in the youth groups and my dedication to the Zionist movement. Among his other remarks, he says:

"I feel myself to be among the fortunate, when I see the labors of the teacher have born fruit, and the first of the educated ones is making aliyah. Futritzky! Don't forget the words of your teacher, and don't stray from the path that you have hewn for yourself. Your teacher's blessing to you is: may all your wishes come true! Go on and succeed!"

Mr. Freidin's speech made a strong impression on all the participants.

Director Rosenbloom spoke in great detail about youth and its relationship to Zionism and to the Land of Israel, stopping to describe my own work for the Zionist foundations, my dedicated efforts on behalf of the *Histadrut* and *HaShomer HaTza'ir*, in which I served as the head of the chapter and head of the section. With best wishes for a successful *aliyah*, and for the realization of my desires, and with the greeting, *Hazak Ve'Ematz!*, he finished his speech, which lasted about an hour. After Comrade Rosenbloom, the Director of the Zionist *Histadrut*, Ch. Y. Lev spoke, and the Treasurer, Aharon Rotni. [Jacob] Rotni spoke on behalf of the Land of Israel office, for *Tarbut*, Elchanan Potztiveh, and on behalf of *HeHalutz*, Ezekiel Halpern, among his other remarks, said:

"Even though our comrade, Futritzky, stands here on the right, I hope that in the Land of Israel we will find him in the ranks of the Labor Histadrut."

Moshe Rafilovitz offers a blessing on behalf of all the comrades and youth. And similarly, all the attendees are quick to chime in with similar blessings for me on my *aliyah* to the Holy Land. At the end, the Director of the *Keren Kayemet L'Yisrael*, Nahum Helman spoke. And he especially spends a good part of his time describing my work on behalf of the *Keren Kayemet*. And in this vein, he adds:

"Futritzky was not satisfied with working only for Keren Kayemet, but also took an active role in our other international and cultural branches of endeavor, such as the Zionist Histadrut, the Office of the Land of Israel, HaShomer HaTza'ir, Tarbut, and others of this kind..."

and he finished as follows:

" *Our dear comrade, Futritzky!*

I haven't come at this time to thank you for all your work, because you did what was incumbent on a young Jewish man with a cosmopolitan outlook to do, but I do approach you on behalf of the local committee of Keren Kayemet, and convey to you our most heartfelt recognition for the international efforts you have made, and for all your great dedication on behalf of Keren Kayemet in particular, and as a recognition of your work, the committee, at our last meeting on 3 June 1927, has decided to present you with an award of excellence as a memento."

This memento was a silver medal in the form of a Star of David, which on one side bore the inscription: "A memento from the *Keren Kayemet* Committee of Zelva," and on the other side, "To E[liezer] Futritzky." And in a like manner, he reads from a proclamation from the local committee, permitting me to display the medal, and a proclamation from the central committee of Poland, and also conveys thanks to me for my active participation as a member of the drama society of the local committee. He then gives me the proclamation, that was received from the central committee, that cites the fact that I had served as secretary, and asks all the international foundations in the Holy Land to offer me any assistance that is necessary. As all the attendees rise in their places, the Director of the *Keren Kayemet*, Nahum Helman, pins the medal to my coat.

The Director of the Zionist *Histadrut*, comrade Lev, reads the contents of the proclamation that was received from the central office of the Zionist *Histadrut* of Poland, as evidence that I had served as secretary of all the international foundations, and asks all of the Zionist *Histadrut* organizations to help me in connection with my settling and getting organized in the Holy Land.

Director Rosenbloom reads the contents of the proclamation received from the central office of the *Keren HaYesod* of Poland. They also read the contents of the proclamations received from the local Office of the Land of Israel, and the *Tarbut* branch, and place them in my hand.

At four o'clock in the morning, to the strains of *Tehezaknah*, and the *Hatikvah*, the celebration comes to an end. We left in high spirits, buoyed by the impact of the marvelous celebration.

* * *

My friend, Moshe'l accompanies me. He will spend the night at my home. How I feel the strong bond that exists between us at this moment. Just as I don't want to visualize the moment of parting from the members of my family, so I don't want to bring to mind the moment of parting from Moshe'l. It is difficult to take leave of all my friends, because we were all together like one body. But, there is a big difference between the rest of them and my dear Moshe'l. Moshe'l and I were as if we were one soul. His thoughts were my thoughts, mine - his, my secrets were his, and his - mine. Any little thing that was on one of our minds was immediately communicated to the other. It is difficult, oh, so difficult to take leave of a person who was a friend of this sort to me for 16-17 years, because we were already playing together when we were both two years old... but how much has happened during our lives since... it is equally hard for him to take leave of me - and he is spending this last night of mine in Zelva, sleeping over at my house. Moshe'!! Moshe'!! Will I ever - or will you ever - again find another friend of this caliber as we were to one another? Moshe'!! I swear before you, my dear and

beloved friend, that we are only parted in body, but my soul...neither oceans nor days can remove my affection for you. Even from across the ocean I will remain dedicated and bound to you.

And let not my other friends feel that I am indifferent to them. It is equally difficult for me to take leave of you, but even you will have to agree, that there is a sort of difference between Moshe'l and yourselves... the bond of affection between my dear Moshe'l and myself stems from childhood days, when we still used to hit and cuff one another.

Here I am lying on my bed and thinking: I'm resting on my bed, in my mother's home, I see my house, I see my brothers, and sister, and the members of my family, my aged grandmother, and everything that is dear to me, and tomorrow, tomorrow morning, I will not see, either my home, the members of my family, my friends, and all who are near and dear to my heart. Mountains and valleys, fields and vineyards will separate us. I will have to be satisfied with just the pictures that I am holding in my hands.

Tomorrow, and the day after, if I'll want to see my home town, I will have to lie down on my bed, close my eyes and conjure up the image of the town in which I was born, Zelva!! *Oh, Zelva, my Zelva!!* And it was with these thoughts on my mind that I fell asleep...

I awoke at dawn. I remove the blanket from me, and I see that my mother is standing with a candle in her hand, and she is crying, crying, and tears are falling from her eyes, tears... and her tears - are falling on my heart...

My poor mother was up at dawn to bake me biscuits, presumably as food for the journey... and in the meantime, in going from the bedroom to the kitchen, she had paused by my bedside, and stood at my bedside and wept. When she saw that she had awakened me, she left me, because she didn't want to upset me. Ah, but my mother, my dear mother!

And the hour inevitably came. It isn't possible for a young man of eighteen to sit in his parent's home and to eat their food indefinitely as if it were charity. This is simply not possible. This time had to come, sooner or later, and the hour came to part. I covered myself with my blanket, and oh, so quietly, I wept over the fate of my poor mother... and I fell asleep...

* * *

10 March 1926

Tonight, I leave my home town of Zelva... all the members of my family are milling around the house lost in thought... what a condition there is today in our home! I am proceeding to collect parting best wishes from my near ones, friends and acquaintances.

Obtaining these good wishes was difficult for me, because who here did I not know? Isn't this a relative, that one a neighbor, the next one an acquaintance, this one went to school with me, that one I had a conversation with once, and in addition to all of this, in connection with *Keren Kayemet*, and *Keren HaYesod*, hadn't I visited nearly the entire population of the town? All day, I went from house to house...

At three o'clock, accompanied by my friend, Mordechai, I went to Rabbi Damta. I spent about two

hours there, and we spoke of many matters, and after obtaining his blessing, a rabbinical blessing, he escorted me to the door, and we parted.

I came to see Moshe'l's father who was sick. I offered him my blessing that he should recover from his malady, and return to full strength. He thanked me, and burst out crying just like a little child. Needless to say, I burst out crying as well, and so did Moshe'l, his mother and sister. Everyone who was in the house wept, they wept like little children. Nevertheless, there was no choice. I left. Moshe'l and I, exiting his house and crying. We walk over to a side street so no one can tell that we are crying. We stood there for about 15 minutes and wept. Do you know what it is for friends to cry like this together?...

I remembered that I hadn't yet taken leave of my teacher, the principal of the *Tarbut* School, comrade, Motlovsky. I went to his room, but didn't find him there. He was observing the mourning period - his mother had passed away... I went to approach him in the synagogue, and I found him leaning over a book... I feel the tears rolling down my face, why? - I'm standing before my beloved teacher. Is he not one of those who instilled in me the very yearnings that I am about to go and fulfill... is this not the very synagogue in which my forefathers, my father, grandfather, the rabbis and *gaonim*, of blessed memory, spent most of their lives? This is where they gave thanks to the Lord for what ever good fortune came their way, or, heaven forbid, prayed in the event of misfortune. This is where they poured out the bitterness in their hearts... what a sanctified emotion seized me in those few minutes...

I took my leave of the Director of the local *Tarbut* chapter, comrade Rosenbloom. He was unable to see me off at the train that evening because he was not well.

And in this manner, I took leave of all my dear ones, my acquaintances and my friends...

I enter my house. My mother is sitting next to the table and crying... my old grandmother is sitting in the corner and weeping... I feel that any minute I will no longer be able to control myself, but I overcome the feeling. My mother gives me lunch - the last lunch I will receive from my mother's hands, but to my great disappointment, I take no satisfaction in eating it. I have no appetite at this time.

Again, I am hanging around outside and in the street, but I can't find any peace. I go into the garden, and stand on a little mound and watch the sun set. For the last time I see the sun set in my house... in my town... and it seems like the sun is taking its time in setting, because it too wants to keep me in good spirits...

And that is the way I stood for about a half hour, until the sun had completely set behind the mountains. I went back into the house. Inside the house they had already put up lights. The neighbors and relatives were beginning to gather in the house. The house gets fuller by the minute. All around, the women sit and chat with one another.

- what are they doing here? - why did they come? - to see me expire?...

I can't think in such surroundings. I want to be alone. I go into the bedroom, I think, and I feel that my heart is just filling up with explosive, and that any minute, it will burst, explode and spread all over. I regain control using all my will power.

My friends come into the room and interrupt my thinking. Suddenly, my friend Bathsheba Bashkin from Dereczin comes into the house. She is a very close friend of mine. About two, or two and a half years ago, I met her when she visited Zelva. She is a young, beautiful and well-developed young lady. From the first time I met her, I was attracted to her. I would visit her home town of Dereczin frequently. Although I had many reasons to visit there, I visited for only one reason, Bathsheba...I love her...but it was a platonic relationship, two friends, and she has come to bid me farewell, and her arrival gladdened me considerably. We hugged and kissed each other.

Everyone goes out to the second room. I am left with my brother, Yitzhak [Izz]. We are talking to one another, when suddenly, he bursts out crying: "you are going away, leaving us, yes. How fortunate are you to be released from our abandoned and unfortunate household, but what will I do, I, what will I do?" I feel his pain, but it is not within my ability to comfort him, for I also desperately need comfort...

The clock strikes nine...

A carriage pulls up to the side of the house. They have come to take my belongings. My brother, Yitzhak, takes the bundles and suitcases, and rides to the train station to arrange the loading.

The first step has begun...

As they take the bundles and suitcases out of the house, my mother bursts out crying, and then my sister after her.

-My God! What will happen in another half hour?

The clock strikes ten...

The members of the *Keren Kayemet* committee come into the house, the Director, Helman, my beloved teacher, and family member, comrade Freidin, Potziveh, their groups, and others...

I put on my overcoat. There is keening in the house. I brace myself. I begin to take leave of those in the house. I go around and around, and take leave of each one, I take leave of all the members of my family, my relatives, from my frail grandmother, who no longer has the strength to even cry, I take leave of them all.

An the minute that I feared finally arrives. My mother falls on my breast, hugs me and bursts into a bitter cry:

"Oh, Eliezer, my beloved son, we are parting from one another, and who knows, perhaps forever, perhaps I will never see you again, you are all leaving me. Oh, how I worked, and how I suffered until I managed to raise all of you. And with whom will I remain? Your father is dead, your oldest brother is dead, and you are leaving, and your two brothers will also leave me soon, and I, an abandoned widow, will stay behind with her only daughter. We shall remain behind, two women, forsaken and abandoned we shall remain, along with the four walls of the house..."

With this, I could no longer control myself, and I, too, burst out crying:

"Mameleh, don't worry! I am going to our Holy Land, to the Land of Israel. Only a short time will pass, and we will be together again."

We stood this way for about five minutes. My friends are urging me to hurry, and if not, I'll miss the train. We hugged each other again and in the company of my friends, Moshe'l and Mottel, I leave the house in which I was born, where I was raised and where I was educated. There are hundreds of people waiting by the side of the house. I go out of the yard, and everyone starts to walk. Suddenly, I hear the voice of my poor mother:

"Eliezer, Eliezer, my dear son! Please, come back just once more.."

My heart melted. I turn back, and she hugs me yet again, and weeps with bitter tears... And again we stand for about five minutes, and everyone else is waiting. I think I also heard a silent weeping coming from the crowd.

I took leave of my poor, dear mother with a broken heart. Just now am I beginning to feel and understand what a mother is all about...

We, the young, do not know how to show our parents proper respect, at the time when we are under their care...

I walk ever so slowly, and I still can hear my beloved mother's groans. My heart shrinks from all the pain, and yet with a few more steps, my mother's voice becomes muted.

I turn to the edge of town, towards the side of my house, and look at it for the last time. I wanted to go back to the house, and to see my mother again, but I was concerned for my mother's health...

- Goodbye dear mother, goodbye friends, and acquaintances, goodbye, goodbye to all of you! I walk ahead, and I see before me how my mother is sitting at the side of the table and cries, and my heart, my heart is constricted with pain... and that is how we reached the half-way point.

And suddenly a voice wells up inside of me:

"Eliezer, Eliezer! You are going to the Land of Israel!"

-and everything changed...

In my imagination, I already see all of the Land of Israel, her blue skies, and all that is marvelous there... and I am making a transition from the present world to a world that is completely different...

With this thought in mind, I enter the railroad station. The station is full of people, who went ahead of us, there are acquaintances, and people who simply wanted to accompany us. After all, I am travelling to the Land of Israel... I find myself in high spirits. My friends did not imagine that I would be in this kind of mood at this time. Nobody believes that I am the one who is making the trip...

Another young man and young woman are travelling with us, but everything is centered on me... Travelling with us is the Director of the *Keren Kayemet* of Dereczin, comrade Mollor, and his family.

The clock strikes eleven...

In the distance, the whistle of the locomotive is heard, as it draws near. I take leave of my friends and acquaintances, and now comes the third step... I take leave of my sister Rivkah... and again there is much crying and groaning. I am no longer crying. I am in a completely different frame of mind. I

am going to the Land of Israel.

The train arrives, and they put my belongings onto the train car. My brother Mordechai [Max] will accompany me as far as Warsaw. Everything had been organized as it was supposed to be, and I went up on the first step of the train car to offer my best wishes to all those who came to see me off:

"Honored attendees, and friends!

It is most unpleasant for me to take leave of the members of my family, my relatives, and the community in which I have spent eighteen years, but the idea is, that I am going to our Land, the Land of my wishes, the Land of Israel - this is my comfort. Goodbye, goodbye, goodbye, my dear and beloved ones. I hope to see you all once again in our Land, the Land of Israel that is being built! Goodbye to you Zelva!!!"

A clarion of "Hurrahs" burst from the hundreds of mouths of those that were gathered.

The train conductor closes the door and forces me to go inside the car. I open the window. The entire gathering is singing *Hatikvah* and *Tehezaknah*. In my heart I feel myself standing and growing strong, that I will not burst out crying. My sister Rivkah is standing opposite me and is crying. I gird myself... I stand as if frozen.

Suddenly there is a long whistle. The wheels begin to turn. Slowly at first, and then faster, shouts of "hurrah," "*Hazak VeEmatz*," "Next Year in Jerusalem," burst from the lips of the onlookers, and for the last time, I look back into the faces of the people who guided me for eighteen years. The shouting and the noise still ring in my ears, and suddenly, it all changes, everything is transformed, and it is over.

GOODBYE, GOODBYE, GOODBYE TO YOU ZELVA, AND ITS RESIDENTS !!!

I sit down in one of the corners of the train car, and my brother, Mordechai sits opposite me. Both of us are lost in thought. Is my brother so deep into his thoughts about me? Most certainly.

A picture passes before my eyes:

A month ago, two months ago, three months ago, five months ago, we used to escort the *Olim* [pilgrims to the Holy Land] to the train station. On the way to the station, we would sing and dance. How great was the happiness!! And afterwards, in the station itself, came the parting... and here, the train comes. The singing of *Hatikvah*, and *Tehezaknah*, the train disappears, and we, with song on our lips, quietly, and still dancing, would return to our homes. How marvelous were our spirits at that high point...

And here, right now, I am sitting in a corner, entirely sunken in thought, and they - they are going home, singing and making merry, and *their* spirits are soaring...

Suddenly we hear a whistle... our train has reached Volkovysk, where my friends, Rosa Kabintovsky, Zina Levine, Gutka Lev, Merozinick, and another one whose name I've forgotten, and my friend Joseph Lipik were waiting for me. Again the whistle... we parted.

At each station, *Halutzim* were added to our ranks, and with them our spirits rose hour by hour. At

each station we were greeted by a large crowd. Waiting by the side of the station were parents and relatives, that had come to escort their near and dear ones, and again there was song and dance... the atmosphere became more and more pleasant, but with the coming of the dawn, a sort of sadness settled on the faces of each person, a hidden sadness...

* * *

11 March 1926

We reached Warsaw at 7:30AM. We debarked at the Vilna Station as the city was beginning to rise from sleep. All the electric buses were full of people on their way to their places of work. On the streets, workers of every description were rushing to their jobs, carrying the tools of their trade. Automobiles were going to and fro. In a corner, a policeman was standing and rubbing his hands together. Little boys, selling newspapers, ran alongside the electric buses yelling "*Heint, Moment, Courier Farang, Courier Krarbonie, Rabotnik*." Across from the station is a row of shoe shine boys. Warsaw is humming.

We got on the number 6 electric bus which goes to the Ogrudoba area. We are spending the night at the home of my brother's sister-in-law, Batia. She had already gotten up to go to work, and she handed us the *Heint*, which I started to read, and suddenly I saw my name in large letters: Eliezer Futritzky. It contained best wishes in the following language: [From the Yiddish]

"On the occasion of his departing journey, our best wishes to our co-worker in all the Zionist foundations and institutions, Eliezer Futritzky who is going to the Land of Israel, we offer him our wishes for good health and we wish him good fortune in our old-but-new home.

His friends at the Zionist Histadrut, Keren Kayemet, Keren HaYesod, Palestina, and Tarbut Library.

Zelva, Vesten March 1926."

Naturally, I was very happy to see this notice of best wishes. I took one copy of it and put it between the pages of one of my books in order to preserve it.

That same day, accompanied by my brother, I went to the central *Eretz Yisrael* office at Marzhinaska 10. I was examined by the physicians at the office, Dr. Fackar, and Dr. Lansky. I took care of all the issues regarding the *Eretz Yisrael* office. Thanks to my efforts, I was excused from paying the immigration tax of the government of the Holy Land, in the amount of between 7 - 9 dollars. That same day, I finished all my tasks, and I was ready to leave Warsaw, but we had to wait for a special train that was not leaving Warsaw until Sunday, March 14.

12 March 1926

We visited the home of Mr. Chaikin, the editor of the newspaper, *Heint*. My brother's brother-in-law was also invited to their home for lunch.

During the day, we walked the city streets, and visited many interesting places. That evening, we wanted to go see a performance of *HaBimah*, from Moscow that was touring Warsaw at the time, but to our great disappointment, we were late for the performance. Instead, we went to the Jewish

art theater, *Azel*, at Danaga 50. The theater was very small. Only a couple of hundred people could fit in it. The subject of the performance was wonderful: On Israeli Dance, and the monologue was delivered by Gudik Parsheh Beigel.

13 March 1926

We visited the brother-in-law and sister-in-law of my brother, Mintz, and his wife, Masha, the sister of my sisters-in-law, Rivkah and Zipporah in Prague.

14 March 1926

In the morning, we visited with these same acquaintances. For lunch we were invited again to the Chaikin home, and towards evening, my brother, and sister-in-law Batia rode to the east side train station. From there we were booked to travel to Constanza.

I had to take leave of Moshe Chaikin at his home, because he had to stay behind in order to prepare the evening edition of the *Heint*. Mrs. Chaikin, Julia (Yocheved), and her daughter promised to meet us at the train station. Also, Mrs. Mintz promised to be there as well. At six thirty, we arrived by electric bus to the Dozhik Wilansky train. This special train, which would take us as far as Constanza, was already waiting on the siding. All the cars were full of people, but nonetheless, I was able to find myself a comfortable spot in one of the cars. I brought in my valises, and I arranged a comfortable place for myself, and then went outside again. At the side of the train, waiting for me were my brother, Mordechai, my sister-in-law, Batia, and Yocheved, Masha and Shoshana Chaikin.

The trainyard was full of thousands of people, women and children, who had come to see off their sons, relatives and friends. The hubbub gets stronger and stronger. The trainyard is getting fuller by the minute. A variegated picture unfolds before you:

Frail Hasidim with white beards, young men wearing long *kapotes*, with long curly sidelocks, and men and women in the balconies are singing and dancing. From one corner you hear *Hatikvah*, and from a second, *Tehezaknah*. The atmosphere is festive.

A quarter of an hour goes by, and the parting best wishes begin, kisses, tears, amid shouts of "Next Year in Jerusalem" and "We'll See Each Other in Israel" and "Go in Peace and Arrive in Peace." There is a hodge-podge of crying, good wishes and song, everything mixed together.

At seven thirty, the train starts to move. I am parted from them all. My breath stops. They are hugging and kissing each other, over and over. There, wailing and crying, and here singing, and suddenly: "*My dear one, you be sure to write every week*" - a commandment from a mother to a son. The train begins to accelerate. The rhythm of the wheels accompanies the wailing, and the singing, and on this night of voices, it is deafening. Under the strains of *Hatikvah*, that burst forth from the accompanying crowd and from the "lucky" group that was going to the Land of Israel, the people waving their white handkerchiefs begin to disappear, the train station vanishes, the relatives vanish, and among them also... also... my brother Mordechai...

I feel, my heart... but I am travelling to the Land of Israel...
And it is my good fortune that I am the one who is travelling...

* * *

ZELVA 100 YEARS AGO

Writings from the Years 1891-1900

HaTzefira, a Weekly, later a Daily, Published in Warsaw

Abstracted by Yitzhak Shalev

Volume 91, 30 Nissan 5651 in April 1891.

Zelva - Emigration to the Land of Israel! These two words are now on everyone's lips in our town. Everywhere that we go, we see that each person is talking one to another about this. Several skilled workers, who because of their abilities, plan to leave town this coming summer to go to the Holy Land upon receipt of letters from people who know them, because there they will be able to apply their skills in order to obtain an income for their little ones. This is in place of having these same workers being idle all day in our own locale, because there is no one to hire them even for minimal work.

We have heard the news that from nearby towns, that families with the financial means have travelled to buy tracts of land in Palestine, and the people who return from their trips to the Holy Land say that "the Land is very good, and the property obtained by the people there has turned out well for them," and because of these reports, the excitement in our town has increased considerably. Many houses are up for sale practically for nothing, but there are no buyers, no prospects, and no one looking to buy, because who wants to buy houses in the hour when his soul and spirit is focused entirely and only on the idea of going to live in the Land of Israel? And who has the desire to spend his money at a time when he has one foot here, and the other foot is planted in the Land of Israel! An endnote: Every man thinks thoughts and sees in his vision the gates of Jerusalem opening before him, and that he will lack nothing if he will just come to the Holy Land and be fortunate...

Ze'ev Kaplan

Volume 135, 25 Sivan 5661 in 19 June 1891

Zelva 14 June - Notwithstanding the daily warnings and news that reaches us, advising that our townsfolk should not go to the Holy Land without sufficient funds in hand - many people from our area are planning to leave the land of their origins and to cast their lot in the land of Palestine; in any event, those people, who travel there without money, cause a great deal of problems for themselves, and they add no value to the condition of the settlement there in general...

Ze'ev Kaplan

The Slonim Diary (*Pinkas Slonim*), Volume III, Page 130
Volume 101, 26 Iyar 5655 in 8 May 1895

Zelva - About two-thirds of our town went up completely in flames yesterday at dusk, leaving the affected property owners with nothing. The enveloping fire took hold suddenly in two or three places

simultaneously. In the twinkling of an eye, the greater part of the town was engulfed in flames. Those who were burned out were among the poor and needy, and they were left naked and without anything at all, and at this moment do not even have their next meal. This is the tenth time that we record a day of a fire in our town this year, and if the previous nine times left a deep impression on the memory of the community, this conflagration made an even larger impression because of its ferocity.

Eliezer Libert Shereshevsky

Volume 109, 10 Sivan 5655 in 21 May 1895

Zelva - The arsonists who set fire to the town were apprehended on Friday. They were all taken to the jail. It is known with certainty that they are the ones who set fire to the town.

H.S.

Volume 111, 13 Sivan 5655 in 24 May 1895

Zelva - A committee has been established to provide aid to the victims of the fire, and the head of the committee is the arbitrator (*farrednik*), the Kohen, Mankovsky, and of our own distinguished gentry, Avraham Sedletsky, and Moshe Oryansky.

Y.A. Aranovitz

Volume 129, 4 Tammuz 5655 in 14 June 1895

Zelva - Even amidst want and deprivation, everything depends on luck, even in the case of a town consumed by fire... If all of the towns that suffered a fire receive rains, let ours be the one to receive the least amount... Our Jewish brethren, far and near: do not turn a blind eye to our impoverished town, please send donations, and let us hear from you, lest, God forbid, a Jewish community be eradicated from the midst of Israel...

Ze'ev HaKohen Kaplan

Volume 132, 8 Tammuz 5655 in 18 June 1895

Zelva - The authorities have forbidden the townspeople to begin construction before the creation of an overall municipal plan. For housing, it has been communicated to us that it is necessary to leave a space of eighteen *ammot* as a space between houses, and many of the fire victims have been wiped out as a result of the re-allocation of space between dwellings. It is three times already, that the townspeople have gathered in the house of the rabbi, to arbitrate between the two factions of fire victims, the "eliminated ones," and the "returning and re-building ones," because the former want the latter to compensate them for the loss of their property - and the participants left about the way they came, without having decided either on major or minor issues...

Libert Shereshevsky

Volumes 154 and 161 1895

(There were two correspondents who accused a Jewish merchant of the arson but afterward it was proven that the accusation had no substance. - The Editor)

HaMelitz, a Weekly, then a Daily, Published in Odessa and St. Petersburg

Abstracted by Yitzhak Shalev

Volume 43, 9 Tammuz 5645 in 10 June 1885

Zelva. Close to Slonim, 2 Tammuz - We were judged with thunder, not the thunder from the heavenly heights, but with the thundering that we had been on the receiving end in recent years - the thunder of the "barefoot bunch," and workers drunk on wine...

On Sunday, June 2, five railroad workers who were then working on the track being laid between Baranovich and Bialystok came to town, and after having drunk their fill, they went over to the Jewish stores and began to steal anything that they could lay their hands on, and the storekeepers did not confront them, knowing that this was not the time for a Jew to confront every robber and thief; but the workers were not content with this, because they also began to beat on the heads of passing Jews with iron rods that they carried in their hands. The Jews showed concern for their safety and began to run from those who were beating them, and unwittingly, one of the drunkards got hit in the head and started to bleed from his wound. The hurt one reacted violently on the ground, and raised his voice, calling for help, saying that the Jews hit him and were trying to kill him. His friends rushed to their companions who were located at a field outside the city, and in about a half-hour, about fifty of them showed up, armed with iron rods and wooden staves, yelling in loud voices: "Beat the Jews!" - and they began to wreak havoc in the town. In one hour they smashed all the glass windows in the homes of our brethren to smithereens, even the windows in the synagogues were not spared. All the stores were padlocked, and two stores that the owners didn't manage to close up from the outside, were pillaged, and nothing was left behind. People who passed by out of doors were stoned with heavy rocks, and one man and a woman who didn't have the strength to flee for their lives were struck by large stones in the head, and they both are now hovering between life and death. Pillows, linen covers, and even books were torn up, household utensils were smashed, a wine cellar was emptied into the bellies of the vandals, and the rest was spilled onto the ground. The end of the thing was like the thunder whose name and memory causes a dread among all our kinsfolk in these recent times. The one policeman who could be found in the town made no effort to restrain these vandals. This morning, the Inspector of rural police (Становой Пристав [*Stanovoi Pristav*]) came, and after him, the county officer, and a doctor, to assess the extensive damage and injury done to our brethren. They also visited the injured Jews, and wrote all of this down in their book. Afterwards, they went to visit the injured railroad worker, who was hurt by the Jews, but they no longer were able to find him in the hospital, because after the drink had worn off, he fled the hospital in the night, and he was back at his job along with his companions. A guard was put over eight of the thieving railroad workers, that were recognized by the victims, and also over two Christian townspeople who were found in possession of stolen goods in their homes, and tomorrow they will be brought to the jail at the county seat.

We continue to fear what they might do to us in the days ahead, because the railroad workers will take their satisfaction with us, as indeed they have already started to do, and we fear that their hand

will be at us yet again, to do with us what they please. We pray that the Almighty will see our desperate plight, and return to us peace of mind, because we have had our fill of trials and tribulations without number, and our misery has risen above our heads.

Shimon Duber Freidkin

Volume 49, 1 Menahem Ab 5645 in 1 July 1885

Zelva. Near Slonim. - The perpetrators of the vandalism in our city were sent to the county seat, as I reported in the *HaMelitz* Volume 43, but they were not sentenced to jail, because the assistant prosecutor did not feel that it was appropriate, and they are currently free to do as they please, and they are up to their old tricks again as before, until word came from the district attorney at the county seat, to bring their trial to the district court (Окружной Суд [*Okruzhnoi Sood*]), or before the Justice of the Peace...

On June 19th, a representative of the county came once again to our town, and he went out to gather up the Jews into the synagogue, and having gathered them together, he went up to the lectern and addressed them in the following manner:

" I am here at the behest of the district officer who sent me here to speak to you, because even though the railroad workers are guilty of the vandalism that they wrought, you yourselves are the cause of all the damage, because you afforded the perpetrators an opportunity to get together, and to wreak this havoc among you, when you defended yourselves; if you had gone to complain to the police officer at the time that a few of them started to act destructively, then you would not have suffered so badly, once it had become known to him. There is no connection between the workers actions to attack you other than they drank too much, and accordingly, they acted crazily and riotously. Therefore, when they saw everyone gathering in one place, they thought to themselves that you had come to pursue them, and that is why they banded together to defend themselves and to kill the Jews. I am warning you, that if one or a number of these workers touched any of you with malicious intent, then you are to immediately go and lodge a complaint with one of the three policemen that are stationed in this town or with the section police officer, who is now also located in this town, and you are not to take the law into your own hands, and don't go run with great commotion because of things you hear in one place or another. I am also advising you that your request for army soldiers to be stationed in town for your protection - has been granted, and tomorrow, a unit (рот [rot]) of troops will arrive in town, foot soldiers led by two officers, and guards (patrol), who will patrol the streets continuously, and when needed, you will be able to turn to them for assistance, and then you will have peace and tranquility."

To the sound of: "We hear [and obey]," - which burst forth from the lips of all those present, the officer descended from the lectern, and went his way. And we, what are we to say afterwards? Amen, may it only be as the officer said, and let us, indeed, have peace and tranquility. We say, even now, that when the workers gathered in the middle of town, even if they embarrassed us, or cursed us - all day we were silent. If they came into a store, or a saloon, and didn't pay for anything that they bought, or for the whiskey that they drank, no one touched them, and they were sent away peaceably, and it was only after a few of them started to beat the people standing around them with iron rods,

that a few of the storekeepers stood to defend themselves.

With the large number of guards circulating through the city, our peace of mind was a bit restored. But because of this, our brethren who reside in villages that are close to the rail line, melt every day with fear, because after the ability of the workers to attack the Jews in the city was limited, they will pour out all their wrath on the Jews who live in the villages...

On June 20th, the army unit came to the city, in accordance with the word of the county officer, with great fanfare and music, and we were made further at ease.

Shimon Duber Freidkin

And a Divine Voice answered from the heavens:

"If I hear another voice, I will transform the world into water. I will render that which is beneath me into a void without form.

It is a decree that goes out before me.

ACCEPT IT

You, who lovingly adhere to the faith with daily constancy..."

- The Martyrology, Yom Kippur Mahzor

FROM THE MOUTHS OF THE SURVIVORS

The Partisans

by Moshe Slutsky

Written in Yiddish

Translation from Yiddish into Hebrew: Y. Moorstein

When the War broke out in 1939, I was serving in the 42nd Battalion of the Polish Army in Bialystok. From there, we were taken to Brest, the Germans attacked us, and we retreated to the Kobrin-Kobel road. It was there that we received word that the Red Army was attacking. Our command disbanded, but was able to provide us with documents, and we prepared to head for home.

From the time we reached Zelva, the Germans bombed the city heavily, and the city went up in flames. My family was uprooted and sent to a nearby village, but when it was captured by the Germans, they returned to the city. The Germans appointed "Abba Poupko" as the leader of the community. In July 1941, about twenty Nazi SS officers arrived, and they ordered all adult Jewish men to gather in the center of town, and to line up. In front of them, they raped a young woman, and then gave her 24 lashes. This scene was terrifying, and left a very deep impression. The head of the SS declared that if the Jews followed all the orders of the head of the community, they would not be beaten, and he immediately requested that all the teachers, accountants, rabbis, and anyone with an education step out of line. In answer to the question, "Why?" came the answer, "To do knowledge work." They were taken to the Bereshko Forest and shot.

The Germans put the Jews to work at all sorts of labor, and in the process shot and killed many of them. On one day, the [German] leader sentenced seven Jews to be hanged. The execution was carried out publicly, in the marketplace, in front of all the residents of the town. Both Jews and non-Jews were ordered to build the gallows. The Germans murdered with "clean hands" according to their view, claiming that they were only hanging lawbreakers... the seven corpses were left hanging for three days.

I worked on breaking up stones for the road, and it was there that we discussed how to organize ourselves and how to obtain ammunition. Among the organizers were: my brother, Katriel, my cousin Nathan Slutsky, my uncle Hannan, Isaac Michal Kabintovsky, Abraham and Dov Loshovitz, Isser Selman (a man from Warsaw), Gorovitz, the three Zlotnitzky brothers, and several refugees from Lodz.

Nathan worked for the Germans as a locksmith, and managed to smuggle away a sub-machine gun with 500 rounds of ammunition. My father brought 3 rifles from the forest. We cleaned them, dug a ditch, and hid them.

On November 2, 1942 in the morning, the SS troops that came from Volkovysk surrounded us, demanded a list of all the Jews, and ordered us to report to the train station. We decided to flee the ghetto, and I was the first to leave the concentration point, and after me, came the rest of the band. In view of the fact that my sister had just undergone surgery, my father stayed behind to look after her. In all, we were ten men.

As we crossed the Ruzhany road, the Germans strafed us with machine gun fire, and we scattered. In one of the places, I remained with my brother, cousin, and a Jew from Warsaw. We forded the Zelvianka River, and with nightfall, returned to Zelva. In the city, already there was not a Jew to be found. We dug up and found our ammunition, re-crossed the river, entered the forest and began our attempt to contact partisans. On our seventh day in the forest, we saw a wagon approaching us. We took cover by the side of the road, and when the wagon passed us, I ordered the occupants to stop. Four men jumped out of the wagon and identified themselves as partisans. To our surprise and elation, these were four men from Dereczin whom I knew: Gedaliah Basiak, Mishka Ogulnick, Mania Koblinsky, and Israel Koblinsky - all of whom subsequently were killed in combat as a result of sorties they led against the Germans. These were active fighters, in the "Bulak" partisan group from the Shchuchin command on the shores of the Shchara River. On their word, we were accepted by this group, and together we went to work, which turned out to be sabotaging the Warsaw-to-Moscow rail line that passed by Slonim. After implementing this task, the enemy opened fire on us, but we succeeded in reaching our base. The mission was carried out with great expertise.

At this time, there were 38 combatants in the group, all of them Jewish, except for the Head, Shubin. The commander of battalion one was Eliyahu Lifshovitz of Dereczin. Battalion two had Eliyahu Kobinsky from Volkovysk, awarded the Red Star and the Order of Lenin, and the command of the brigade of Chaim Moshe Lifshovitz, who fell in a siege in June 1944. His place was taken by Dr. Atlas from Lodz. This group distinguished itself by being so active, and was well known for its combativeness, and for carrying out exceptionally heroic missions.

That night, the division commander Valentin, and the group head Bulak arrived, and questioned me regarding my motives in coming into the forest, to save myself or to fight. And when I answered that I would not surrender the weapon I had in hand, they gave me a mission to obtain shells for their cannon. Five of us went out: my brother, my cousin Nathan, Mania Koblinsky, Moshe Ogulnick and I. We departed with two wagons - 80km to Zelva. Not far from our house stood a tank, and in it there were approximately one hundred shells. We received an order not to engage the enemy. We crossed the Warsaw-Moscow railroad tracks, and we reached the town of Bereshko, in the Zelva environs. We woke up a farmer, and ordered him to ferry us across the Zelvianka River. We warned him, that if he gave us away, we would shoot him on the spot. When we successfully crossed the river, we began to load the shells onto our wagons, but the noise of the wagon wheels on the thin roadbed, attracted the attention of the German sentries that were nearby, and they opened fire on us. We returned the fire immediately, in order to retire. By morning, we had managed to return as far as the farmer's house, and then to our camp. This was reported by the German command in their dispatches as having "successfully repulsed a partisan attack." We began our preparations for the winter. To this end, we moved our camp to Volko Volya, a wide stretch of forest on the road to Zhitiel. I led and arranged for the construction of five houses that were 3 x 5 meters in cross section, and also a bakery.

On December 6, 1942 we were visited by the officers of the partisan division. During the somewhat festive reception held in their honor, they conveyed their impressions of the Jewish fighters. At the same time, the Germans opened up a broad general assault on us. We dug in on the banks of the Shchara River, and with every piece of artillery at our disposal we denied the Germans the ability to cross. After three days of fighting, Dr. Atlas from Lodz, who was the battalion head, was killed. He had organized our group, he was the spirit that breathed life into it, and was a model of courage. His motto was: anyone who survives is obligated to take revenge upon the Germans to the utmost of his ability. We could not fulfill his last wish, which was to bury him beside his parents. We buried him with full military honors in our camp in the "Borolum" partisan cemetery.

In view of the fact that the strength of the German forces stood at forty thousand troops, and pressed us with its full might, we were forced back to the outskirts of Baranovich, where we also were ambushed by known forces. Because of this, we entered the forests around Slonim. In this period, contention broke out among the various partisan groups, particularly among the commanders, and our group suffered losses.

During the siege, the Jews suffered from hunger. Bulak forbade the Jewish officers from looking after the food supply. Despite this, Kobinsky and Lifshovitz sent men to bring food. When Bulak confiscated a Jewish partisan's ammunition, our leadership decided to move to the camp of Orlinsky, and it was at this time that Bulak shot two Jewish woman partisans, Shlovsky and Becker, and evicted several families as well. A similar incident occurred in the Avramov camp. They searched for Kobinsky and Benjamin Dombrowsky, but they succeeded in blending into the Shubin group. We decided to establish a new camp, a complement of five houses, each 5 x 10 meters in cross section, 1.7 meters high, and each window, 0.2 meters in height. Each house had an iron stove, and on the roof - snow for camouflage. In this fashion, we erected a hospital, a kitchen and a bathhouse. Most important of all was security, and in the forest, there were always security patrols.

With the assistance of a treasonous farmer, the Germans mounted an attack on our camp and succeeded in entering the bakery, but the workers, like Malshinsky, and Bela Bernstein, managed to escape, even after the Germans fired at them and wounded them. The partisans returned a furious attack, and the Germans in retreating, left many dead and wounded and they fell back. About thirty families from Dereczin lived in our area. In the tumult of the attack they started to run, and 16 of them were killed.

During the month of February, we derailed eight trains carrying battle ready troops. We were at a strength of 250 men in the attack on the village of Khatzivka, which harbored the "Samokhovsky" force, farmers who fought against the partisans as an auxiliary army to the Germans. We attacked from all sides, and our enemies fell by the sword, and afterwards we took what remained of their guns and ammunition. In the end, we put the village to the torch, and left it in ruins.

In March, Lifshovitz received orders to carry out a mission to destroy a food supply convoy that was being sent to provision the army in Dereczin. The orders were given also not to engage the enemy in battle. When we got to within seeing distance, we realized that we had gotten too far outside of the forest. We fell back to the village of Sluzhy on the banks of the Shchara River. At dawn, the Germans launched a major assault. Our leader Lifshovitz ordered us to cross the river on rafts and to set up defenses. Apart from rifles, we also had two machine guns, and with these, we were able to stall their advance. On the following day, the Germans bombarded us with cannon fire, and we were forced to retreat. From that point on, fighting broke out in the forest, and after suffering losses, the Germans retreated. At the end of the month, the Germans concentrated a large force in the area and besieged us. We began to fall back to the area of Slonim and Baranovich. We set up a camp of ten tents camouflaged with branches. From there, we began operations. We cut telephone lines and blew up a railroad bridge adjacent to Baranovich. We wiped out two companies, one was a supply company, and the other from Vlasov's army. The results: 5 dead, 3 captured, 2 mortars, 10 rifles with ammunition, and a lot of food. In the sector, there were 5 German armies in addition to the Vlasov battalions, but without armor (tanks), it was not possible to attack them frontally. In the village of Tvorog, there was a tank that was left behind by the Red Army. The mechanics of the tank were damaged, but a partisan among us repaired it, and we put it back into service. When we reached the banks of the Shchara River, the Germans attacked us with the help of Ukrainians. We managed to

ford the river, despite the fact that we were in the heat of battle, and only after several days did we return to camp without casualties, even though we had been given up for lost.

In groups of ten men, among them Lifshovitz, Ogulnick, Basiak, Blizninsky, and I, we went out on missions, and we engineered the blowing up of trains, and of railroad track in several places. We reached the town of Rus, a distance of 50km from our base, in two wagons, and we attacked a cement factory. We eliminated the guards, and herded the workers outside, and put sixteen kilos of dynamite into the factory boiler system, destroying it completely. In this way, we eliminated production capacity equivalent to three trainloads a day.

In the summer of 1943, the Jewish group obtained the mission to destroy the Dereczin city hall, and to obtain supplies. Eighteen of us went out on this mission. After a basic scouting by a former resident of Dereczin, Joseph Blizninsky, fifteen men, supplied with dynamite and instructed in demolition, set up the charge on the best side of the building, and as we fell back, we attacked a supply convoy that was bringing provisions to the police camp at Ruda Jaworska.

From command headquarters, we received notification to carry out a mission: at 9:00AM, a supply convoy consisting of fifteen wagons loaded with foodstuffs and munitions will be on the road passing by the village of Sluzhy. There will be three units participating in the mission, and I was in number 2. Their role was to hide themselves about twenty meters off the road, give the convoy the opportunity to pass them, and to go into action only if the convoy attempted to retreat. Unit 1 was to wait for the convoy on the other side of the road, and Unit 3 was to lead the attack. In accordance with our timetable, we allowed the convoy to pass, and only when they reached the firing range of Unit 3, did that unit open fire, and the convoy escort began to fall back, and it was then that we got them in a withering crossfire, and after us, Unit 1 with fire and shouts of victory.

Results of the battle: 20 dead, 11 captured, all police. We brought all the spoils, food and ammunition to camp, and it consisted of: 5 heavy mortars, 2 light mortars, 15 rifles, 5 mortars, hand grenades, a large supply of bullets, and supplies for a large populace. As we reached our camp in triumph, the base commander greeted us with great pleasure. He immediately sent for 3 wagons from the village of Azyurky, and on them, he loaded 20 of the dead with the following note:

Honored Commissar!

We ask that you forgive the sender's untidy packaging. Next time we'll straighten out the mess!

Our leadership anticipated a sharp reaction by the Germans, and sure enough, the attack wasn't long in coming. At 12 o'clock a large force began a rifle attack on the village of Sluzhy and a part of the forest not far from our camp. They assumed we would return their fire, thereby revealing our positions, but instead, we held our fire, and they stopped their advance about two hundred meters from the village. In that location, a stream meandered by, and over it was a small bridge. We blew it up, and when the Germans began to try and ford the stream, we opened fire on them from all sides, and they started to retreat in panic, leaving behind a tank which we burned, many dead, wounded and prisoners. On our side, Moshe Ogulnick, Levit Maustrov, and Lipman were wounded. The prisoners were brought to camp. Some of them were shot immediately on the spot, and the rest after interrogation. After this incident, the Germans did not move supplies through this territory.

One of the partisans caught his brother and brother-in-law, and turned them over to the commander, Bulak. They were shot by him for treason and spying.

After one operation, when the Germans sent in a punitive expedition against the village of Sluzhy that consisted of 300 men, our unit of 18 men was sent to meet them (this being an error made by headquarters). Needless to say, we didn't hold our ground for very long, and we beat a hasty retreat, but not before Fanya Lifshovitz from Dereczin was mortally wounded and died. There were 4 fighters from the Lifshovitz family: Eliak, a division commander, Chaim-Yehoshua, Gershon and their sister, Fanya. Fanya and Chaim-Yehoshua were killed in battle, while Gershon was wounded and remained an invalid. Not once did Fanya ever want to stay within the confines of the camp, and like her brothers, participated always in all the fighting. We brought Fanya back to camp, and buried her with full military honors in the presence of all the members of the camp in the partisan cemetery in the forest of Ostrov Borolum. Our unit there was called Победа [*Pobeda*] meaning, "Victory."

We moved to a new location that was near the Shchara River, near Chornaya Kolonya. Our mission this time was to repair a tank and use it to attack the Germans in the area. This plan became known to the Germans, and in the month of September 1943, they attacked us with the objective of hitting the tank and destroying it. After the Germans captured the village of Peshchinka and burned it, we retreated and entered the forest. Our command then canceled the above mission, and we began to prepare for winter. We crossed the river and entered the forest of Dobrovshchin. Every unit in one camp set up dwellings and outhouses. My brother and I were the builders. Apart from the quarters for our section, we also built a hospital, bakery, kitchen and bathhouse. After we put up these buildings in the end of December, several additional partisan groups joined us, and they appointed officers to head new units. I was attached to section 172 which consisted of 4 divisions of mine layers and one which was administrative. Our mission was to sabotage the movement of the Germans on the Vilna road between Slonim and Krulevshchina.

In one operation, when we were advised to destroy the Ostrov camp, all three sections participated, 180 men. In the dead of the night we attacked, all the partisans, with unending fire. The Germans had their sleep interrupted, and after we dealt them losses in tens of dead, and many wounded, we took 26 prisoners, a great deal of booty, which included a cannon, 2 heavy mortars with two stands, many rifles, 45,000 rounds of ammunition, food, and a variety of other types of armament. We lost two men. After this attack, the Germans put us under siege, and with the help of Ukrainians and Byelorussians, sealed all the principal roads from the forest to the railroad tracks. They attempted to try and advance on our campsite. We allowed them to close in on us, but as soon as they reached firing range we opened fire on them and inflicted loss of life on them, and they fell back.

During the period when we carried out operations on the Vilna road, our section organized an attack on a supply convoy of 20 wagons loaded with armaments, clothing and food. This convoy was earmarked to supply the needs of the encampment at Krulevshchina, but all of this was captured. A month before the great offensive launched by the Red Army, the Germans made all preparations required in order to attack us and wipe us out. They sealed all the roads with a large army, and covered all the roads leading to the forest with tanks and cannon. Our command decided to move to the Niliebuki forest. On the third day, we reached the road leading to Zelva, and we opened an offensive in order to enable our force to advance. The fighting was extremely brutal. The commander, Avromov, was killed, as were Misha Ogulnick, Tuvia the Fighter, Shlovsky and his sister (another sister was killed by our leader, Bulak), and 4 other combatants. This enabled our force to reach the vicinity of Baranovich. Our crippled section ceased to exist. The survivors broke up into smaller units

to facilitate logistics. Our new commander was Kanoplov. In the course of a month, we moved from place to place. At the end of June, we re-joined a unit of ours in the Niliebuki forest that had suffered casualties in the heavy fighting it had been obliged to undertake. It was in those battles that Chaim-Yehoshua Lifshovitz and his wife, Galia were killed, as were the commanders Yuvlev, Kostrankov, and Zerbztov. We began to get ready for more operations.

On July 12 the Red Army reached us. The siege was lifted, and we advanced together with the Red Army. I was attached to the engineering corps, construction battalion 269 near the Svyslutz River, and we fought for over two days. In our advance, we approached the vicinity of Bialystok. There was heavy fighting there, but we carried out all the missions assigned to us. After these battles, the Germans retreated from Bialystok, and fortified themselves in the city of Choroszcz on the Narew River. Our army constructed iron drums within two days, and put boards across them, and our forces advanced on these boards. The Germans took heavy losses, but so did we. In our advance, we reached the city of Choroszcz on October 10, 1944. In the attack on the city of Makov I lost a leg.

HERE IS THE CITATION I RECEIVED

**COMMAND OF THE WHITE RUSSIAN PARTISAN MOVEMENT
BARANOVICH DISTRICT**

JULY 16, 1944

The head of the *Pobeda* Partisan Unit, Lieutenant Colonel Bulak, and the Officers Krylov and Smirnov hereby:

Certify herein that **MOSHE** and **KATRIEL**, the sons of **MORDECHAI SLUTZKY** of **ZELVA**, joined a fighting partisan unit on November 6, 1942 as combatants in the A.S. Saborov Brigade and served until June 12, 1945.

Attached to this is a medical certificate because Moshe lost a leg in battle.

A Family Among The Partisans

Alta and Ephraim (Foyka) Gelman

Translated by Y. Moorstein

We and our two children were among the few survivors when the Germans entered Poland as far as Bialystok, in accordance with the pact between Stalin and Hitler to partition Poland. Our city, Zelva, was captured by the Russians, and we began life under a Communist regime. The well-to-do, the *Borzoi* to the Communists, the Borodetzky, and Spector families, Moshe Lantzevitzky, and Wallstein were exiled to Siberia. Whoever couldn't prove that he was a worker, was not considered fit to receive gainful employment. I left to go Bialystok, and there, I received a Soviet visa, and I worked up until the time the Germans invaded Russia in June 1941. When I returned to Zelva, the Germans bombed the city. The houses were burned, and the city was left in ruins, along with eighty dead and wounded.

After several days, the Gestapo men arrived who then ordered all the men to report immediately to their leader. In that same instance, forty members of the town's intelligentsia were taken to the Bereshko Forest and shot to death. In this undertaking, the Germans were assisted by Polish youths who were deputized as police for this purpose. Starvation began to squeeze us. It was impossible to obtain a piece of bread, in view of the fact that everything had been burned and there was nothing to offer the farmers in the way of an exchange of value. When seven butchers were caught on the suspicion of smuggling meat, all the Jews, and the rest of the residents were compelled to watch them hung in the marketplace. After the Succoth holiday, all the Jews were deported, along with those living in the surrounding villages around Volkovysk, with incredible overcrowding, and under inhuman circumstances into colonies, and from there -- *to the gas ovens of Treblinka*.

We lived in one of the cellars until the Germans came on July 6, 1941. When the Germans arrived, Alta and I packed our belongings, and with our two daughters, headed for Dereczin. There were still houses standing in this city. We lived there for about seven months. When they started to organize a ghetto in that place, we returned to Zelva, but were it not for the fact that we were not registered in the list of Jewish residents, we would have been marked for death. Consequently, we wandered to Volkovysk, and there I was given heavy work building roads. I worked about 14 hours a day. We found a place to live in a house with 5 other families. When they were getting ready to deport the Jews from this place, we managed to sneak out of the city at night. After 10 days of wandering, we crossed the Zelvianka River and reached the forests between Dereczin and Zhitel. We had several adventures until we met up with a number of partisans, who brought us to the camp of "Bulak", in which 150 people lived, among them families from Dereczin, the brothers, Moshe and Katriel and their cousin, Nathan Slutsky from Zelva. We were accepted into the camp that operated under martial law, and we lived there for 26 months. Our Jewish brigade undertook sabotage operations such as blowing up trains and railroad tracks in the midst of heavy fighting. In the fighting against the Germans, losses ran about eighty percent among us, over the years. The details about this dreadful fighting, and the revenge we exacted for our dear ones, are covered in Moshe Slutsky's narrative.

In July 14, 1944 we were liberated by the Red Army, and we left... to return home to our city. There, we found only heaps of ruin. From all the houses, schools and the Great Synagogue, all that remained standing was one wall...there was no place to bed down for a night. The gentiles were certainly not happy to see us. They were afraid that we might perhaps recognize the property of Jews in their possession. To our surprise and joy, we found Mordechai (Mottel) Loshovitz in Zelva, who survived by a miracle, and arrived to this shattering sight of Zelva. We did what we could for him. In

September 1945, we left our town, and reached Salzburg-Linz (Austria) by illegal means. We lived in Austria until 1951. From there, we emigrated to the United States, where we raised our family and lived to see our grandchildren come into the world.

We are extremely fortunate to have survived, but our hearts ache for those victims, who gave their lives in sanctified martyrdom. *WE SHALL NEVER FORGET THEM !!!*

Alone In The Forest

by Mordechai Loshovitz

I was drafted into the Polish Army prior to the outbreak of the war in 1939. In the fighting against the Germans at Chorny-Bor, I suddenly heard someone calling me by my name. In an ambulance, lay Shmuel Konkevitz, a friend from home, wounded by a bullet that lodged close to his heart, and no one was attending to him. He begged me to convey news of his condition to his family, and his wife, whom he had just married two months previously, when a heavy bombardment started, and we were separated.

After several days of heavy fighting in the vicinity of Lomza, our camp fell apart, and I found myself a prisoner of war. In the concentration camp for prisoners, which was organized in threes, I saw Isaac Michal Kabintovsky, one of my relatives, in one of the rows. I ran to join him, but received blows to the head from a cudgel, and was forced to return to my place. From that time on, I never saw him again. There were many, many prisoners in the camp. That night, a horse whinnied, and the Germans thought it was the beginning of a prison break, and they opened fire. The screams of the dying and wounded reached the gates of heaven itself. In the morning, the place looked like a slaughterhouse. One of the wounded was Jonah Garzabsky, whom we managed to drag over to us. The Germans transported us to Germany where we were interned at Stalag One which housed about six thousand prisoners. In the camp, I also encountered Leizer, the brother of Jonah. Both of them were ultimately killed in the Holocaust. Shmuel Varinsky, another townsman of mine, was left with me. We lived together for a year and a half. Through the efforts of the Red Cross, I received one letter from home, and a food package.

They planned to transport us to the Bilew Podolski camp that had Ukrainian guards, where living conditions were said to be sheer hell. From what we heard, they used to take the inmates to concentration camps from there. On the way there, I jumped off the train and began to wander, at peril to my life. I changed my clothes so I would look like a gentile, and in this manner, I reached a village near Brest where I was taken on and given work as a carpenter. In the entire area that I wandered through I did not see a single Jew.

In September 1942, they became aware that I was Jewish, and it was then that I fled to the forest and hid. I dug ditches and lived in them. I stole potatoes from the yards of farmers; occasionally I succeeded in trapping a rabbit, and it was only through sheer instinct that I managed to survive.

In the summer of 1944, the Russians broke through. I emerged from hiding on to the road -- to freedom, with the feeling that I had somehow managed to overcome the Germans. With my inner ear, I heard the bells of my home town, Zelva, but my path was laden with pitfalls. After considerable tribulation, I finally did reach Zelva, but to my great sadness, I did not find even a single Jew there; not a single house was left standing. Only one wall of the Great Synagogue still stood in place. The

cemetery, the roads and streets, were all covered with wild undergrowth.

From one of the houses that had somehow managed to survive in town, a gentile emerged whom I knew, and he invited me into his dwelling. From him, I learned of the terror that befell our loved ones before they were deported to Volkovysk and from there -- to Treblinka. In this gentile's house, I saw candlesticks, tablecloths and bedding...

The entire city was consumed in flames from the very first bombardment. They (The Germans) killed off the intelligentsia immediately, and afterwards, in their madness, they totally cleaned out the Jews from the city. The Germans also hung five Jews, among them, Abba Poupko, the community leader, David Vishnivitzy, and Noznitzky. The only one who survived was Malka Lifshitz, who had taken ill, and was confined to bed. When the Germans found her, they butchered her in an unusually cruel manner. I was the only Jew in Zelva until the return of Shayna Loshovitz, Moshe Slutsky, and Foyka Gelman, the latter being the only one to return with his family, excepting Shayna Loshovitz. Our focus was to reach the Holy Land. I got there in 1945 by illegal means.

Mining Gold Above The Arctic Circle

by Shmuel Kaninovitz

My life as a youngster was not materially different from that of other young boys my age. I was a member of *Hashomer HaTza'ir* and participated in a number of Zionist activities.

In February 1938 I was drafted into the Polish army, and in May 1939, my company was assigned to the German frontier. We camped down there, and dug trenches to fortify our positions. On September 3, a dark night, the Germans attacked us with rifles and bayonets, and we returned the fight with vigor. In the battle, I was hit by a dum-dum bullet in the leg, and fell wounded to the ground. Our company dispersed all over the countryside, and I quickly found myself a prisoner in a field hospital in the city of Kutno. We received notification that anyone who wanted to, would receive a discharge that would enable him to go home. I switched plans and reached Zelva at the end of October after considerably dangerous travels. It was there that I learned of our comrades missing in action, Jarnovsky, Loshovitz and Novikovsky.

In May 1939, I was drafted into the Russian Army at Baranovich, and when the enemy began to gain the upper hand in the war between the Russians and the Germans, I was given the opportunity to go home, or to continue with the withdrawal of the Russian forces, and it was in this manner that I reached Smolensk. I was outfitted for battle, and was thrown into brutal fighting. Out of my unit of 25 men, only 2 survived, and 4 were wounded, and I was among them. The conquering Germans finished off their job by massacring anyone they found alive. I lay without moving among the battle casualties, and when one of the Germans stepped on me, he must have decided that it was not worth wasting a bullet on me, and that's how I was saved from a hell that is difficult even to describe. I had been wounded in the arm, and I was taken into a unit that brought me to a military hospital in Novosibirsk. There, I was ordered to set down my memoirs in writing. In those writings, I mentioned that I has served in the Polish army. Because of this, the N.K.V.D. detained me, and accused me of being a German spy. It did me no good to explain that I was Jewish, and that the Germans were exterminating us. My sentence was handed down in a matter of seconds: exile to Siberia for seven years.

In view of the fact that our food intake was 400 grams of bread a day, I became a mere shadow of my former self. My weight dropped to 42kg, until after two years, I made the acquaintance of a cook who had me assigned as his assistant in the kitchen. From that point on, I no longer suffered hunger. On the contrary, I was in a position to help others. In 1944, I recognized a young Jewish man from Poland who had managed to establish connections in the Holy Land. I remembered my sister's address in Haifa, and I let them know of my existence. They started to send me packages, and made efforts to have me freed from the labor camp in Novosibirsk, but instead of letting me go, I was sent to Kolyma, above the Arctic Circle where the temperature falls to fifty degrees below zero. They gave us the job of mining for gold at a depth of 20 meters below ground, on meager rations and under conditions so difficult that they were unbearable. I managed to hold on until 1947, but at that point I began to fail. My legs wouldn't respond, my eyes closed up, and I lost my ability to see. It was at this time that a rescuing angel appeared to me in the form of a Russian, who found some hot soup that he fed to me. Slowly, but surely, I regained my strength. After this, they assigned me to clean out offices.

The camp commandants, Iosif Bobrov, Kovalevsky, Tchlitzky, and Shaklirsky were Jewish. I told them my story, and how I had gotten there. With their help, and through a long, tortuous journey, I managed to finally reach our own dear, dear Land!!!

Two Years In The Pit

by Faygel Gerber

Abstracted from Yiddish by Y. Moorstein

What I experienced during the war was shattering and terrifying, until I was rescued.

My brother, Isaac Nahum, went to Vilna to study at a *Yeshivah*. Several days before the outbreak of the war, I left to join him at his urging, but when I arrived, I no longer was able to locate him. The Russians had sent him to Siberia. We learned that the Germans had begun a terrifying bombardment of Zelva. Because of this knowledge, I did not return there. I was rounded up with the Jews (of Vilna) and put into a ghetto. Here, the Germans ordered us to line up in rows, and with terrible blows raining down on us, they separated part of us, myself among them, and the remainder were taken outside the city and ordered to dig pits, and over them, thousands of Jews were shot to death. The cries of the victims must surely have reached the ends of the earth.

Left alone, with no means of support, I joined up with a woman, a mother with two children, whose husband had been taken outside the city to be killed. Together, we sought some means to escape, and while we were able to get out and reach the city of Varanava, there too, we found slaughter. Somehow, we managed to flee to the village of Rezin, and you can imagine how happy I was to find my townsman, Joseph Krinovsky there, who afterwards was killed in the ghetto. We hid on a roof along with several other Jews. After the Germans finished their job of exterminating everyone at hand, they began to look for surviving stragglers. We had a baby with us that burst out crying, and his parents could not make him keep quiet. With my own eyes, I saw his father smother him to death...

In the night, we slipped away from our hideout, and reached a factory building. We stopped to rest a little, and a farmer passed by who took pity on us, and invited us to hide in the yard of his house. He even brought us bread and milk. From here we began to wander. We were warned not to try and

return to Vilna. Again, we were fortunate with a farmer, certainly one of the righteous people in this world, who dug a pit behind his house and "settled" us in it. Even though he did not have many means, his wife and daughter cared for us and fed us, and when the snows came and covered the pit, the daughter walked through the snow in order to offer us assistance. Sanitary conditions under these circumstances were, needless to say, not very good. My whole body was covered in sores. More than once I prayed for death to finally come and take me. The farmer's family, whose name was Adamovitz, lived very frugally, yet it shared with us whatever it had. You should understand that we still correspond with this family, and from time to time I send them packages.

I traveled to Zelva after we were liberated, and all I found there was destruction and ruins. There were only a few houses left standing in the city...

It is our obligation to do all we can to preserve the sacred memory of our dear ones who perished.

I married Moshe Yarkonsky, he also was a Holocaust survivor, and together we emigrated to the U.S. where we had relatives who lived in New York. We have a son and a daughter.

I Jumped From The Death Train

by Sandor Spector

Translated from Yiddish by Y. Moorstein

In 1930, I opened a warehouse for building supplies in Grokhov Warsaw, in which twenty laborers worked daily, who were members of the Grokhov community. When the war broke out in 1939, I left Warsaw together with the chief accountant, Ze'ev Varnivky, but we got separated along the way, and alone, after great difficulties, I reached Zelva. At the same time, my brothers, Jacob and Shalom, returned from the army, and my parents were very happy. In 1940, my younger brother, Shalom went to Warsaw because he could pass for a gentile by his appearance. After a while, he wrote that I should come. When I got to Warsaw, it was still possible to live there. We were permitted to live among the Christian population provided we tied a blue and white band on our arms.

The *Judenrat* of the ghetto was held responsible for providing hundreds of laborers every day, and they were given bread for their work. This condition persisted until 1942. At that time orders were received to produce 10,000 people a day and to march them to a field. From there, they were taken to an unknown destination. When the head of the Jewish community, Chernikov, became aware that the Jewish people were being exterminated, he committed suicide. Had he reacted differently, and warned the people, it is possible that many Jews would have survived and joined the partisans and others who were rescued.

My brother, Shalom, couldn't stand the predations of the general populace and he left, going to a small town called Rambrotov, provisioned with silver. We made up to meet in a certain place on the following day, but when I got to the rendezvous point, there was not even a trace of Jews. They had all been transported to Treblinka. I got in touch with several members of the Polish police who were known to me and of good character, and made a request for them to try and get him out of there, but their answer to me was that it was impossible. No one returns from that place. I then went to the trouble of obtaining a hacksaw that could cut steel, having decided, that if I ever got put on such a train, I would be able to cut my way through the train railings and jump off, and that's exactly what eventually happened. When I was loaded into a train car, I immediately began to saw the railings, and

when the train slowed up after leaving a station, I jumped off. This was at night, and I continued to lie absolutely still. In the morning, a farmer found me, and took me to his home, fed me, and refused to take any payment from me. He pointed out the way to the train station, and that was the way I reached Grokhov. I turned to several people whom I knew, and asked them to take me in, but they were too frightened to do this. I recalled a Polish acquaintance who lived several kilometers from the village, and I went to him. His wife took me in, because, in the meantime, her husband had been sentenced to two years in prison. I offered to pay her a suitable sum of money for her to be able to provide me with sustenance, and she agreed to do this. I remained in hiding with her for about 18 months until the Red Army reached us on August 18. One of the officers was a Jew, and I became friendly with him. He told me that he hadn't encountered a single Jew along the entire way he had come.

My brother, Shalom, who was transported to Treblinka, was put to work there gathering together the valuables taken from those to be executed. All of these valuables were then loaded into train cars destined for Warsaw, and from there to Germany. In one of these round trips, when he was loading all this booty into the train car, he managed to hide himself in the car and didn't return to the camp, and when the train reached Warsaw, he jumped off, and in this manner, he too was saved, and Poles helped him. Yes, there were some like that too...

My parents survived by virtue of being exiled to Siberia during the days when the Communist regime had control in Zelva. My father died in Siberia.

Today we live in Melbourne, Australia.

On The Way To Concealment

by Avraham Lapin

In 1945, I left Russia on my way to Poland, in the hopes I would find some members of my family that remained in Poland before the war, but my hope was in vain. I reached Poland by train. We disembarked in the sector of Germany that was ceded to Poland, at the city of Shvednitz. There, we organized ourselves into a group that had the objective of one day emigrating to the Holy Land. In a matter of a few months, I was sent to Lodz, where I participated in training for group leadership, and after I finished the course, I was sent to head a branch of the *Irgun* in the city of Szczecin. One day, Zvi Natzar arrived, who was an officer and representative of the *Haganah* in the Holy Land, and he deputized me along with a number of my colleagues, to organize the infiltration of Jews into the Holy Land by all sorts of illegal means.

At the same time, the number of Jews that were uncovered and identified to the Central Jewish Committee in Poland, established after the liberation, began to grow. In the first count, 80,000 survivors were found out of a population of three and one half million, and it was necessary to evacuate them out of Poland, but first, we had to get them organized.

The emissaries who came from the Holy Land, together with the existing workers on site, established in the German sector ceded to Poland, resettlement camps for adults, young people and children. The camps were built with abandoned German materiel. The Joint Distribution Committee took responsibility for providing food and clothing. While we, the workers and evacuation agents prepared them for the daring evacuation to come.

As it happened, many Poles concealed Jewish children in monasteries, in villages, and other hiding places, in order that these children be caused to embrace the Christian faith, but we exercised every measure to find these children, and to bring them to the gathering places for Jews, and from there, we took them in trucks out of Poland by illegal means.

The Communist regime viewed our efforts on behalf of the Jews favorably. The regime had its own problems to deal with. It had the problem of trying to reconstitute a ruined nation, to care for the wounded, and repatriate refugees returning from Russia. There were incidents where the Poles attacked our settlements and even killed Jews. The Polish police authority, which included people who were greatly ashamed by these incidents, supplied the people in these settlements, and even gave them arms to defend themselves. The police leadership was not disposed to assuming responsibility for our protection in the face of these bands who preyed on us. With all this, they also never considered the idea of these Jews departing Poland.

The evacuation leadership, consisting of Zvi Natzar and his staff, who were responsible for bringing all the Jews to staging centers, also were responsible for finding the various means by which the people could be taken out. Access through Czechoslovakia was closed off. The Poles prevented any exit, and the Czechs denied entry. We found a gateway into Germany through the city of Szczecin. The essential means of escape were set up with the help of the Russian Army that occupied Poland. By paying them heavy sums, they evacuated Jews using their train transports, but it became rapidly clear that even after having taken bribes, they were not averse to plundering the Jews, and there were even instances of murder.

The evacuation leadership obtained vehicular transport, and used this to evacuate Jews, but unfortunately, even this means was cut off when the Russian secret police uncovered a large contingent of refugees in the process of being smuggled out. They were exiled to Russia, where they were sentenced to long prison terms. There were many dangers hanging over us, and those whom we asked to provide us with help.

A terrible thing came to light in 1946 in the Polish town of Kleitz where a cluster of 40 Jewish refugees was found in the community house, comprised of old people, women and children. Members of the police arrived there, and demanded that the Jews turn over the arms in their possession that they were using to protect themselves, claiming that this was necessary in the name of security. After several hours, a mob of undisciplined rabble descended on this group of Jews, who were now defenseless, and killed 18 of them with knives, axes and staves, while many others were wounded. On that same day, Antak Zuckerman (may he rest in peace), representative of Polish Jewry, met with Maryan Sapikhalsky, the Polish Defense Minister. Antak described to him the very difficult circumstances confronting the Jews in Poland, after what had happened to them, and after they had managed to survive Hitler's extermination plan.

I was of the impression that the slaughter at Kleitz caused a change in attitude by the Polish regime toward all those engaged in evacuating Jews from Poland. I recall that the Polish-Czech border was opened, and every night we would take 4 or 5 truckloads full of Jews to Czechoslovakia, and from there to Austria. This was a successful period for us.

In 1947, I was taken to Italy (our operations center) along with some other members of the evacuation staff. Our objective was to assemble the Jews of Poland, Rumania, and Czechoslovakia that had been gathered into a variety of camps in Italy, and transport them in sealed freight trucks

to the ports. There, ships were anchored whose destination was the land of Israel. We worked day and night, Saturdays and holidays. I recall that on more than one occasion, when we were ferrying the refugees out to the ships in small rubber craft, a distance of about 2 kilometers, a sea storm would blow up and the small craft capsized and the Jews raised a terrible clamor of screaming and yelling. The screams frightened us, because we were apprehensive lest our activities be discovered by the Italian authorities, but despite the difficult and dangerous circumstances, we achieved our goals with room to spare.

In Siberia

by Sima Borodetska

I am the daughter of the late Herzl and Rachel Borodetsky of Zelva. My father was the son of Shmuel Borodetsky of Zelva. My mother was the daughter of the last Rabbi of Slonim up to World War II, Rabbi Judah Leib Fein, זצ"ל, who was brutally put to death at the hands of the murderous Germans and their accomplices, may their names be eradicated.

In Zelva, my father owned a sawmill, a grain mill that he inherited from his father, and an electric power plant he built to provide electricity to the town and its environs. We owned a gorgeous villa full of beautiful things. Many people visited us, and who were only too happy to be guests in our home. In the summertime, my mother would send me and my twin sister to the health spa in Bereshko that was near Zelva. Our governess, Zhenya, would accompany us there. We owned 4 villas there, and our relatives also used to come to visit us there. My mother and my oldest brother, Jacob, would travel to a somewhat more distant health spa.

My father had university training. He was a graduate in pharmacy and business administration. My mother had high school education, and had completed a course of study at a Gymnasium. We were three children at home. My oldest brother, Jacob, may he rest in peace, who studied at the Gymnasium in Slonim, my sister, and I who attended a public school in Zelva. My father and mother helped many people. Each one helped in his own special way. My father's employees were fond of him because of his good relationship with them. Our life evolved with good fortune and plenty until the outbreak of the war when Hitler invaded Poland in 1939. The sawmill and the grain mill were burned. Only the electric power plant remained.

In 1940, the Russians occupied Zelva. Many Jewish refugees from the towns captured by the Germans fled to the areas under the control of the Russian Army. In a short time, the Russians detained my father, may he rest in peace, in the city of Kobel. From there, he was sent to a concentration camp far into Siberia, Ost-Okhta, and he died there in January 1942.

Many Jewish refugees also reached Zelva, who settled down in public and private places. Several of these refugee families lived with us as well. After a while, they installed two commissars from Moscow in our home, and armed soldiers guarded them 24 hours a day. After the commissars left, they came to us, and told my parents that they had to prepare to evacuate our home, leaving all its contents behind, at a specific time. We moved, at that time, to live in the home of the Mansky family, and we stayed there up to the day in 1940 when they sent us to Siberia. My mother had a sister in Moscow, who when she found out that we were in Siberia, immediately sent us financial assistance and packages. One day, she personally appeared from Moscow with two suitcases full of all sorts of good things. She also brought two cameras. One had a 5-second shutter speed, and the other a standard

speed, along with a lot of photographic supplies. My mother learned to take pictures from a small pamphlet that was attached, and she photographed many people at no charge, just to be able to acquire the skill. Afterwards, she worked as a photographer for several months, and my brother assisted her with developing the prints.

After returning to Moscow, my aunt travelled to Slonim with her little daughter Zhenya, to visit her father, the late Rabbi Fein, and her brother whom she hadn't seen in many years. When Hitler invaded Russia in 1941, my aunt did not manage to get out of there in time with her little daughter, and return to Moscow. She was seized in Slonim, together with her daughter, with her mother, the *Rebbetzin*, and our uncle, as described in the *Memorial Book of the Survivors of Slonim*.

In Siberia, our mother was very active in her concern for us. She drove herself with all her might, and looked after us in every respect. My brother, Jacob, also helped a lot. There were times that we went hungry, and there were times when we had enough to eat. If we managed to have a pot with a reasonable amount of potatoes, well, then we had something to eat after all.

The cold was unbearable, several tens of degrees below zero. There were gale-like winds that blew through the place, called *buranyii* [Буранный]. With the onset of such a wind, it would suddenly get dark in the middle of the day, and it wasn't possible to see your the way to get home. A person who was not indoors, and happened to be out of the city, would freeze to death from the cold.

My brother Jacob completed his Gymnasium studies in Siberia, and even my sister and I studied in a regular school. After graduation, my brother worked at appointed job in an office. It was not possible to survive on his salary, because a pail of potatoes alone cost several months worth of his salary. During the war, we also received packages from America, which were sent by my mother's uncle, Rabbi Kosolwitz of New York. We also received packages from Israel occasionally. These packages contained clothing, foodstuffs, vegetables, and other provisions. This was of tremendous help to us.

In 1946, we were given an amnesty, because we, as citizens of Poland, were entitled to return home to Poland. We lived in a commune in the city of Voroltava for several months. Together with the rest of the commune membership, we crossed the border into Czechoslovakia, from there to Vienna in Austria, from Austria to Germany, and from Germany back to Austria. From Austria, we went to Italy over the Alps. We lived in Milan, and after a while, in 1948, we emigrated to Israel from Naples. My mother passed away in Israel a couple of years ago.

As to my brother Jacob, may he rest in peace, there were so many good things about him, you could divide his qualities up among many people. He was handsome, good-hearted, diligent, he was very capable, happy, witty, he stood out in any group, and loved to be helpful with all his might. We were proud of him, and we admired him greatly. He fought against the Germans, and was wounded three times. The last letter we received from my brother Jacob was from Konigsberg, on March 3, 1945. The city had changed hands several times. In his letter, he wrote:

"Mother, I am going into battle. If you receive letters from me, you will know I am still alive."

Two days later, on March 5, 1945, we received a letter from my brother's friend, who advised us that my brother Jacob had been lightly wounded, even though an army officer wrote to us that he had

been heavily wounded in battle, and that they had sent him to a hospital in the Konigsberg area. The officer specified the address of the hospital. My mother immediately sent a letter to that very hospital, and they answered us that my brother Jacob never got there at all. He was believed to have disappeared - missing in action.

I am obliged to cite at least one of my brother Jacob's letters, in which he wrote that after one battle with the Germans, he was separated from the Russian soldiers who fought beside him, and he was left alone. As he was searching for the Russian soldiers, he sensed the presence of two German soldiers, hiding at the side of one of the houses in the area. My brother understood, that if he didn't face them and confront them, they would kill him, so he approached them with a show of confidence, and ordered them to get their hands up. The Germans figured that he was apparently not alone, so they complied, and in this manner, he herded them off until he found the Russian soldiers.

From Zelva To The United States

by Joseph Kaplan (U.S.A.)

Translated from English by: Aharon Freidin

The following is a description of my life from the time I completed my studies at the *Herzliya* Gymnasium in Volkovysk in 1939 until I came the United States in 1941:

During this period of time, I experienced very great difficulties, as did all the Jews of Poland prior to the onset of the Second World War. I had to struggle with a difficult and terrible future before I could achieve a situation to my liking. To my good fortune, my sister, Lillian, reached America six years before I did, and she was assisted by Mottel Perlmutter, who had reached America in 1929. Both of them looked after obtaining visas for me to enable me to continue my studies in the United States. From September 1, 1939 when I was in Zelva for several months with my father and sister Beileh, I attempted to flee to Vilna, which at that time was in Lithuania. I was hoping to receive the visa there, that had been bought for me. In that city, about 10,000 Jews had gathered from all corners of Poland. At the end of 1939, I succeeded in reaching Vilna together with young Jewish people, and among them was Isaac Gerber. After staying there for several months, and after many efforts on my sister's part, finally, the visa to America arrived. In those days, there were no conventional means to reach America. After further waiting and delay in that place for months, the Russians opened the Trans-Siberian Railroad with which it was possible to reach Japan. In September 1940, I boarded the train in Vilna together with 3 other young Jews who were also leaving Poland, and our objective was to reach The United States. We spent one day in Moscow, and then boarded the Trans-Siberian Railroad. We travelled on the train for seven days to Vladivostok, and after a week's wait, we boarded a Japanese ship and reached Japan. There, we also stayed for a couple of months, and after many additional efforts by my sister to renew and extend my visa, I reached Seattle, Washington in January 1941. From there, I travelled for four days after which, at long last, I reached New York, and that is how my long journey, full of hardship, from Zelva to the U.S. finally ended.

The Farmer's Prophecy That Saved My Life

by Yitzhak Shalev

(Does each Nation and Human Being Have a Fate in Life?)

In the summer of 1938, I was on the way from the town of Hurna to Zelva. Because of the deep sand, I walked on foot at the side of the road, with my bicycle at my side. A farmer was walking on the same road. In the course of a conversation we struck up, he told me about a book in his possession that had been passed down in his family from generation to generation. The book was written in the Russian language, and contained prophecies on events to occur in the future. This farmer had predicted the outbreak of the First World War before it happened. On what was to occur in the future, the book said the following: a nation will rise in the West that will assert its dominance over several other nations ("this is undoubtedly Germany", added the farmer). After this, the nation from the West will attack a nation found in the East, a nation that does not believe in God (безвожний народ [*byezbozhnii narod*]). The Western force will capture a large part of the territory of the nation to the East. It will capture the entire grain producing land of the Eastern nation ("this is the Ukraine", said the farmer, by way of clarification). In the end, the nation of the East will assemble a large and overwhelming force of its own, it will throw off the force from the West, and liberate its territory from the hands of the conquerors. The war will be terrifying. Over you, will fly birds of steel, and they will destroy your cities ("so it was written"). One capitol city will be totally destroyed, and the dead will roll in the streets, and there will be no one to bury them ("that, it seems, will be Rome", said the farmer). It appears that in this instance, the farmer erred. The description was more apt to Warsaw.

It will be the Jews who will suffer the most in this war. Out of 100 Jews, only 11 will survive ("that is what is written").

"According to all the signs, this war is about to break out," the farmer said. "I advise you to sell everything you own, and leave Poland. Travel to any and all lands where there is passage, to an ocean or sea that you can reach. But, if you are unable to leave Poland, and the war breaks out, you must travel to the East (На Восток [*Na Vostok*]), and not to the West. Because, in the book it is written that Jews who flee to the East will not perish from hunger, and will live. The Jew that flees to the West will not return, that is what is written..."

When I reached Zelva, I went to my aunt. I told her about my encounter with the farmer. She told me that she knew this farmer; that many knew him. His name was Tarlokov, and she knew all of his stories. He argued and advised, in each store and Jewish home that he entered, that everything should be sold, and to leave Poland, because the Jewish people of that land stood on the brink of a great and terrible calamity. My aunt dismissed his warnings sarcastically: *A Nayer Novee* - behold, a new prophet! Are there now gentiles among the prophets?! And I also relegated the farmer's stories to the category of mystic tales and legends that one hears from time to time and forgets. And after a while, I stopped thinking about the encounter.

In 1941, when the war broke out between Germany and Russia, I was working in the city of Krulevshchina. In accordance with the orders for mobilization, I was to present myself at the office of the commanding officer of the city. At that place, companies of 20 to 30 men were drafted and organized and sent to Slonim. I was in the last company. The commander of the city, who recognized me from my position at the bank, appointed me as head of my company, and gave me the files of the

draftees. Our objective was to reach Slonim by foot, and present ourselves to the commander of that city. I decided to take my bicycle, and with the consent of the company, it was up to me to reach Slonim before them and to verify what awaited us in that city. On the way, I encountered a senior Soviet official returning from Slonim. He recognized me from my job as well. When I told him where I was heading, he ordered me to turn back, with the draftees, and to advise the commanding officer on his authority to cease sending men to Slonim, because the city had been bombed by the Germans and the commander of the city had abandoned his post. I turned back, and advised the men of the company to do likewise. When I reached the office of the commanding officer I did not even recognize the place. Everything was packed, tied up and packaged for shipment. The officers ran about in great confusion and fright and were in a hurry to leave the city. I reported to the commanding officer of the city, and asked what I was to do. The answer was: "I can give you neither orders nor advice. You must decide what to do yourselves." I left the files of the draftees on one of the tables, I took out my own file, and left the building.

Chaos reigned in the streets. The Soviet Command ran helter-skelter, and concerned itself with logistics to leave the city. The local population was docile and passive, and waited for events to unfold.

I set my sights on Zelva. Here I was, again a free man, discharged from the Red Army draft. Once again, I will be among friends, dear ones, and relatives. Our home, commandeered by the Russians, would revert to my ownership (I did not work in Krulevshchina out of my good will). The fear of the Germans, I thought, was probably exaggerated. After all, everyone used to tell, in the First World War the Germans got along very well with the Jewish population. In a conversation with my aunt (who was married to David Vishnivsky), she told me once: "If war breaks out, and the Germans come, we have nothing to fear from them. They will probably relate with understanding to all this, that the Russians took over our homes." I, agreed with her assessment.

After some deliberation, I got on my bicycle in rather good spirits, and headed for Zelva. On the way, I came across a Russian family, with packs on their backs, moving with great haste down the road. In response to my question, "where are you heading?", a 15 year-old boy, bringing up the rear answered me that they were fleeing to the East, *Ha Vostok* (*Na Vostok*).

I stopped cold. I stayed in that spot for a moment. These two words had an electric effect on me. *Ha Vostok!* I said to myself. *These are precisely the words that I heard from the farmer three years ago in the summer! This is the war he predicted!* All the words of the farmer rushed back into my memory, every word, every sentence rang in my ear, as if I were hearing them right now:

"From every 100 Jews there will remain only 11 living! Whosoever will flee to the East (Na Vostok) will not perish from hunger, but will remain alive. A Jew who will go to the West will not return."

Everything in me changed. All my thoughts of Zelva, friends, dear ones, relatives, the house I would reclaim, all were erased and disappeared. Every link that tied me, and pulled me to Zelva was broken in an instant: *NA VOSTOK* - these two words took complete control of me.

I changed my plan. I rode after the family crossing the road. They explained to me how to reach the main road leading to Minsk, because this was the way East, to the old Soviet border. "See!" said the head of the travelling family, "The smoke filling the skies to our left is Slonim burning. And to the

right, Zelva is burning, and the Germans are at our backs. Travel quickly!" I did as he said, and travelled with great speed. In every village that I passed, I sought bread, because I believed every word that farmer had said:

"Whosoever shall flee to the East will not perish from hunger, but will remain alive."

In one of the villages, I bought a loaf of bread and tied it to the bicycle. Rested and confident, I resumed my journey. Close to one of the towns, I met my friend, Jejna Bublecki. He was heading for Zelva. Quickly, I explained to him that it was critical for him to travel with me to the East. A tragedy would occur in the West. I had even seen Zelva burning in the distance. He was convinced, and we travelled together. After several kilometers, he stopped. "You are travelling much too quickly," he said, "I haven't the strength to keep up with you." Again, I tried to convince him. I suggested that he ride first, and I would follow him. He waited a moment, hesitated, and said that he wanted to reach Zelva, and began to weep. And he turned his bicycle around and headed back. I continued along my way and thought: two friends: one to the East, and the other to the West.

The next day, I reached the main road to Minsk. From that moment, I entered a hell on earth. Thousands of people streamed eastward, while low flying German planes sowed death with machine gun fire. I was able to see the laughing faces of the pilots. The way was covered with hundreds of scattered corpses, dead horses still hitched to their wagons, suitcases, bundles, countless possessions abandoned by people, and bicycles. Old and new automobiles were abandoned at the sides of the road when they ran out of fuel. It is impossible to describe the terrors of that road of blood. In my memory, the image of a young woman is indelibly etched. She was beautiful, and she ran about, clutching her dead baby girl in her arms, killed by a bullet that split open her skull. The child's blood had spurted all over the mother's face, arms and clothing. People that passed by her side said to the mother that her child was dead, and that she should bury the child by the side of the road, and to continue to flee. The mother screamed hysterically: *"Leave me alone!! My baby is not dead!! She'll never die!!"* And this mother continued to run about aimlessly, with her baby dangling in her arms.

With nightfall, the hell abated somewhat. The planes did not fly night sorties, and the road was rid of its dead and wounded. I continued to flee as fast as possible, because the Germans were right behind us. Desperate people, retreating soldiers, officers who had stripped off their insignias, all these fell upon me and wanted to steal my bicycle. I resisted them with all my strength. I received blows, but I also returned them, and didn't lose my bicycle. Eventually, I used it to reach the city of Smolensk. In Smolensk, I succeeded in getting on a freight train heading into the heart of Russia. I got into the train after stepping over the heads and bodies of people weaker than I. On the train roof, on the stairs, in every corner where it was possible to hold on, people were crammed in. Day and night we rode standing, and we even slept standing. When I used to awaken from such a sleep, I would always ask the same question: "Is the train heading East?" The people around me named me "the youth who always dreams of the East." In this train, I reached the city of Kazan, and it was there that I spent the entire war.

To this day, I frequently think about my meeting with the farmer, Tarlokov, about his prophecies and their meaning. And always, a single question stirs within me: *Is there a fate for each nation, and each human being?*

The Belzeč Extermination Camp

by Yitzhak Shalev

The year was 1946. The freight train in which we were travelling on our way from Russia to Poland entered a side rail and stopped for a full day at the Belzeč train station, not a great distance from the Belzeč Extermination Camp where over one million Jews were killed.

My travelling companion, a young man from Czechoslovakia, proposed that we inspect the camp. The first Pole we encountered, whom we asked the way to the camp, took us for Poles, eagerly explained to us with no trace of emotion, how to get there, and he ended by adding:

"There's nothing to see there. I can tell you how it was, and save you the trip: they killed them -- thousands a day. They arrived here in crowded, overflowing freight trains, and when they opened the cars, many of them were dead already. They stripped them naked, and took them on foot to a field, and there, they lined them up alongside wide, deep trenches, and shot them. They are laid out there, rows and rows, one on top of another. Now, there is nothing to see there. On top there are a few skeletons and rotting corpses. The farmers from the vicinity dug them up out of the ground. They are looking for gold fillings in their teeth."

When we got close to the place, we saw a circle of women sitting on piles of ashes and digging with metal or wooden eating spoons. "This is the place they burned the clothes of the Jews," they explained to us. "If you search patiently, you find gold rings here, gold coins, and occasionally diamonds. It's probably not worth your while to rake here, you should go on a little further, over the hill, and turn to the right, and go straight up the road. It will bring you to the field where they killed the Jews. There, it is possible to extract gold teeth from their mouths. There's a lot there. It's just hard to stand the stench there in the field. It's a little difficult to breathe. But for strong young men like yourselves this should not be a problem. You'll also find shovels there to dig with."

"I suggest to you that you dig a little deeper," said one young woman, "because the upper levels have already been dug through, and it's difficult to find anything. But deeper, there is still quite a bit of gold. Look! Look how pale these men have become!" said one of them. "Apparently, they're afraid of dead Jews! Go, go! If you put up with a little smell, there is gold!"

With quivering legs, we distanced ourselves from that place behind the hill. "Hey! Boys!" yelled one of the women after us, "Dig deeply, and a lot, so you find a lot of gold, because you owe us a share for the directions you received from us!" And the women burst into a loud laughter, whose echo was heard in the distance.

We approached a narrow road that was bounded on both sides by high barbed wire fences, and the road opened onto a wide sandy field. A fledgling forest grew on three sides of the square perimeter. The open side of the field was where the narrow road we were walking on joined it. From a distance, we could see people digging in the ground. Heavy odors encumbered our progress, and caused us headaches and nausea. We entered the field.

Hundreds of skeletons and rotting corpses of men, women and children were spread all over the field.

Skeletons of women with hairdos, in which the combs and pins were still in place. Fingers with nails, on which there was still polish. Skeletons and corpses of children, with dolls and toys still clutched in their hands. Heads of young girls with pigtails, with a ribbon tied in the end. Heads, with beards and sidelocks. *Tefillin* that had been torn and shredded. *Tefillin* for the head. *Tefillin* for the arm that were still intact. *Tefillin* bound around a hand. Pages from a *Tehillim*, pages from prayer books, stained with dried blood. Skeletons that were still recognizable as bodies, and corpses that were already skeletons.

All my senses were overwhelmed to the point of fainting. My legs, my hands, my body, all seemed to be responding to forces outside of my control, and my thoughts were blacked out. I was struck dumb. My lips seemed to be whispering incoherent phrases. Walking and stumbling, stumbling and walking, we left the field.

We returned to the train. I laid down on the seat. My eyes were riveted on the ceiling. My lips uttered the same sentence, over and over, a hundred times. *A thousand times*. For an hour, perhaps two hours. They whisper and return to the same sentence:

...and the sun shines there, the wind blows, and the forest there is green, and the birds sing there...

WHERE IS GOD ???

The Rescue of Rabbi Kosovsky

by Yitzhak Shalev

In 1938 I lived in the city of Ivtzvisk for business reasons. In 1939, with the entry of the Soviets into our area, I returned to Zelva. These were the initial months of the establishment of the Soviet regime. The town changed completely, the people changed, the way of life changed and the means of livelihood changed. The man of means and renown tried to hide his worth, because he feared the future. Merchants and storekeepers tried to end their businesses, and turn to labor. Smart looking clothes were hidden away in closets. People dressed in simple clothes that didn't stand out or look unusual in any way. Everything took on a drab appearance: people, as well as the surroundings. In these times, I met a man in the street, who greeted me. His identity was unclear to me. When he inquired as to my doings, he approached me and said: "I am Jacovitzky, the lawyer Jacovitzky." Before me stood an old man, sloppy in his dress, bent over, with hair that was streaked with white, and with a beard, also streaked in white. He bore no resemblance to the lawyer Jacovitzky that I knew not long ago, who was young, with an athletic build, athletically inclined, and a good dresser. I stood in front of him dumbfounded. After a moment of silence, he asked if I was prepared to escort him home. He had something unique to tell me. When we entered his house, he turned to me and said: "I am about to tell you something terrifying. You are the only one to whom I am revealing this secret. I ask your word of honor that what you hear from my lips will remain between the two of us only." I promised him this, and here is his tale:

On one of the nights when there was no government in the town, because the Polish authorities had left the town and the Red Army had not yet arrived, some people knocked on my door, representing themselves as officials of the Soviet Regime, and demanded that I open the door. Two men entered the house, both armed, with red armbands on their sleeves. They ordered me to get dressed, and follow after them. When we left the house, they directed me to go to the municipal building, and they followed me with drawn revolvers. In the municipal building, they took me to a room where they told me to sit down and keep quiet. A short while later, the "American" was brought into the room (this was a descriptor used for a rich gentile who had come from America and had bought himself a small piece of property near Zelva. Everyone knew him as the "American"). After him, they brought in two other men who owned property in the area (whose names I don't remember) and finally, they brought in the young Catholic priest from the church on Razboiaishitza Street.

During all this time, we were under the surveillance of three armed men, who did not permit us to talk among ourselves. From the behavior of our guards, and from the fragments of sentences I was able to hear, I gathered that one other individual was still to be brought into the room. After an extended wait, two armed men with red armbands entered the room, and informed the three that they didn't find the Rabbi at home. They organized searches in all synagogues, but he was not to be found there either. After a short conference, they decided to send the two original men back to the Rabbi's house and the remaining ones would begin with us. Up to that moment we had no idea of what awaited us.

The first one was the "American." He was ordered to get up and go to the exit. Behind him walked two of the guards with drawn revolvers. One was left behind to guard those who were left in the room.

They left the building, went around the structure, and brought the "American" to the wall of the

building that was about three meters from the window of the room in which we were sitting, and with no delay, proceeded to shoot him. When he fell dead, they picked him up and threw his body into a wagon hitched to a horse that was tied up near the window. All this took place in the full view of the rest of the detainees who were sitting in front of the window.

After him, they took one of the men who owned property in town, and his fate was the same as the "American's," and then the second man who owned land. When it came to the priest's turn, the dawn started to break. I saw him standing against the wall, crossing himself continuously. He was also shot, and his body thrown into the wagon. I was left for last. I heard the steps of the executioners getting closer to the room. I also heard the wagon moving from its place. The door was opened swiftly, and the two entered the room, and ordered me to get up and leave the place as quickly as possible. They warned me, that if I revealed what had happened during the night, my blood would be on my own head. Apparently, after daybreak, when the residents of the area arose to go to work, they didn't have the nerve to continue with their activities.

After an extended silence, and after gaining control of his emotions, he added:

"Thanks to your Rabbi who was not at home, they lost a lot of time, and were unable to finish their work before dawn, and that is how I survived."

Several weeks after I had met with Jacovitzky, four corpses were discovered in the earth in the Bereshko Forest. The new regime organized an investigation, and the evidence led to five young gentiles from the village of Borodetz that belonged to the communist underground. They were also regular employees at the factory owned by Borodetzky. The Soviet regime wanted to demonstrate that there is law and justice in the socialist order, and arranged a public trial for them.

I attended several of the sessions at the courthouse. The defendants sat on the bench for the defense, with broad and insolent smiles on their faces. They didn't lie, and didn't admit anything. All the witnesses that appeared for the defense testified to the appointments the defendants had in the underground, and their heroism there. The spectators at the trial had the impression that the court was on the verge of awarding the defendants laurels of honor and heroism. The trial continued with recesses of weeks, from one session to the next. The defendants, meanwhile, went free, and continued to do their normal jobs.

Naturally, the lawyer Jacovitzky kept his secret to himself, and I also kept my word of honor to him. Both of us knew that our testimony would not harm the defendants, but probably would harm us. During the hearings, rumors and stories spread about the night of the murders. It was told, that a short time before the Red Underground reached the Rabbi's house, that Ephraim Moskovsky reached the Rabbi and warned the Rabbi about what was about to happen. He advised the Rabbi to flee his house and find a place to hide, until the threat passed.

When I reached Israel after the war, my townsfolk told me about what they had heard from the mouth of the *Rebbetzin* Kosovsky. Therefore, it was Ephraim Moskovsky who came to the house of the Rabbi that night and told him what was about to happen, and in this manner, the life of the Rabbi was saved.

Rachel The Teacher

by Yitzhak Shalev

She came to Zelva from the big city of Bialystok, coming here as a teacher at the *Tarbut* School. In a short time, she endeared herself to everyone. The parents loved her, the students loved her, and we, the friends, loved her. Her laugh was captivating and stimulating. She had a sweet voice. She sang as a solo, and she sang in groups. "I love this enchanted little town, and its inhabitants," she was heard to say more than once. She loved the fields, loved the river, and the mountain that overlooked the nearby forest. A forest that close to a town she had never seen before in her life. We enjoyed being in her company. She was always laughing and singing. We used to say, that Rachel was born to laugh and sing.

She stayed in our town only for a year. She did not return for the second year of school. She married a childhood friend and stayed in Bialystok. We kept in touch with her until 1939. With the outbreak of the war, the contact was stopped.

In Cyprus, 1947, as I stood on a bridge between camps 66 and 67, a woman approached me. Her attention was focused on traversing the steps leading in my direction. She called out my name, and I stopped from moving on. Before me stood a woman that I did not recognize. "I am Rachel," she said, "Rachel the teacher from Zelva." My reaction was effusive and deep from both happiness and sadness. The woman who stood before me bore absolutely no resemblance to Rachel the teacher. She looked to be a full generation older.

In the evening, I visited Camp 67 and entered the barracks in which Rachel lived. She was sitting on her bed (the one piece of furniture the English gave to the detainees in Cyprus) and I sat across from her on the bed of her roommate in the barracks. I listened to her story. Her gaze was fixed on the oil lamp made from a watchbox mounted on a faceless stone. The flame flickered up and down. Thin streams of smoke rose from the wick, reaching the cathedral-like ceiling of the barracks where they vanished into the darkness. She spoke softly, as if she were speaking just to herself:

"Winter, nighttime; the snow has covered the ground. People sat in the forest, in the depths of the earth. They sat in the pit that they had dug for themselves, under the ground, a place set aside for the dead. They wanted to guard their lives. There were six of them. Nighttime, all of them are asleep. In the corner of the pit, Shloimeleh sleeps, twelve years old. Several months ago, the Germans took him, his mother and older sister and herded them into the forest, and stood them together with other Jews at the edge of a great pit, and shot at them. When the mother fell into the pit, Shloimeleh, still living, was mixed in with the bullet riddled bodies, with one bullet wound in his arm. At night, he freed himself from the mass of bodies that were piled on top of him, and he got out of the pit. He crawled on his knees all night, because he was unable to stand up on his feet. At daybreak, he spied a village not very far away. He drew near to the first house, and when the farmer's wife opened the door and saw Shloimeleh, who was half naked and all of him covered in dried blood, she crossed herself and fled in great fright. Shloimeleh remained standing there, apathetic with regard to his fate. His senses were totally dulled. Within an hour, the farmer's wife came out, and brought Shloimeleh to a stable where a horse was standing, washed him down, bandaged his arm, clothed his bare body with an old, worn jacket, too large for his size, gave him half a loaf of bread and a whip in his hand and said:- 'go to the forest! They say that in the forest there are your kind of people wandering about. If they ask you questions along the way,

say that you are going to the fields to gather fruit. And now, promise that you will not return to this village, and don't tell that you have been here.'

Shloimeleh wandered for many days in the forest. Most of the time he would sit on a tree, and sleep there as well. When his bread ran out, he ate the bark off the trees that he peeled off with his fingernails. Now he is among the six. He is asleep. Drops of water from melting snow that get into the pit, fall on his face. He dreams: he is at home, sleeping on his bed, the drops of water falling on his face are kisses he gets from Mamma, just like every night before he falls asleep. A happy smile suffuses his entire face.

In the pit, silence reigns, all one hears is the breathing of the sleepers. Suddenly, they all awaken. The cry of a little child has awakened all of them. Frightened, they get up and crawl on their knees. Each gropes in the dark with their hands to find the narrow opening of the pit, this path only an air passage, in order to close it quickly to stifle the cry of the child. In the center of the pit a young, bearded man sits, his eyes are tired, filled with resignation and fear. 'Rachel' he says, 'What will be the end of all this? You have to find a solution concerning the child. Without him, maybe we will succeed in saving our lives. Because of him, they could find us, and in that case, not one of us will survive. We have to resolve this issue tonight.'

The baby boy continues to cry. The mother presses him to her body, covers his mouth with her palm, and presses on his little throat. In the dark, she saw no eyes. Eyes of many children, looking at her, begging mercy from her, and from all the mothers of the world. Her hands relaxed, and slipped to the ground from lack of strength. The infant fell silent. The pit grew still. The mother got up, and wrapped the infant and went out of the pit. It was cold outside, and a heavy snow fell and covered the earth. The mother stood for a moment, inhaled the clear, cold air, wrapped the infant tightly, and began to walk towards the village. In the village, all was silent, every house was covered in white. From the other side of the village, a dog's bark was heard; the noise was heard all over the area. The mother stopped at the first house, exposed the face of the child, presses her cold lips against his warm face, wrapped him up tightly again, knelt, and laid the child on the doorstep of the house, left the place quickly, and returned to the forest. The snow continued to fall; it fell and covered the tracks of all living things... and the footprints of the mother.

Three years went by. The six wandered from forest to forest, from pit to pit. Three survived, the mother among them. The Day of Victory came. A day of liberation, a day of freedom that they thought of and dreamed of so much. But it was so sad, oppressive and heavy on the heart. Where should they turn? Whom will they meet? Their hearts were torn.

The mother has a hope and a consolation: she has a son in the village. She will go there, approach the farmer and tell him, that the boy that they found on their doorstep in the winter, is her son, and she will take him from them. From this time forward, they will be together, and will never again separate. The mother went, practically running, to the village. The village was far. She rides in wagons, walks on foot, crosses fields and other villages, and does not rest; every minute is precious to her. In her mind's eye, she sees again all the tribulations she went through, the night that she left her child on the doorstep of the farmhouse. Is he alive? Of course he's alive. He didn't freeze that night. When he became cold and hungry, he certainly would have started to cry. He always cried lustily. The farmer certainly would have heard the baby's cry, found him, taken pity on him, and brought him into his house. That's what she kept thinking all those years. She was certain that it happened exactly that way. He must be a big boy already. What will I say to him? What will he say to her? She sees the village from afar. She draws near, identifies the house. This is it! In the summer, everything looks so different. She stops. She looks around,

perhaps she'll see the boy beside the house. How can she stand this? She is shaking all over. She knocks on the door, she is in the house, the farmer and his family are eating the midday meal. There is no child at the table. She attempts to ask. She doesn't hear her own voice, she speaks half words, incomprehensible half sentences, the floor is spinning under her legs. She sees many tables, many windows. The farmer gets up from the table, approaches the mother and sits her down on the bench that is against the wall. He orders water to be brought to her.

'I understand, I understand,' the farmer whispers, 'You are undoubtedly Grisha's mother. We called him Grisha. He was a beautiful child, but he was not strong. He got sick several months ago, and he coughed a great deal and then died.' After a short pause, he added: 'We buried him ten days ago.'

And when the mother, who had suffered all these trials and tribulations, overcame the devastating discovery that awaited her at the farmer's home, she was able, finally to stand on her own two feet, and went with the farmer's wife to the village cemetery.

On approaching the small fresh grave, she pressed herself to the yellow earth that covered him, and a fountain -a fountain- that had been stopped up and locked inside her during all the years of tribulation and suffering, burst open, and flowed, and flowed without end, as if all the Jewish Mothers in the world were weeping together with her ..."

Yom Kippur, 1940 In The Soviet Sector

by Yitzhak Shalev

By Yom Kippur of 1940, all of the synagogues in Zelva had been converted to warehouses, including the Great Synagogue, with its splendid Holy Ark. All Jewish workers, in all places of work, reported to work that day, like any other day.

On that same day, I visited the tailors and milliners cooperative, that was located at the *Moiehr* next to Wallenstein's home. Each worker was chained to his station. Part of the workers sat by sewing machines, part of the workers sat by the cutting tables with scissors and chalk in their hands, ready to mark and cut the cloth that was spread before them. And so they sat, ready for the possibility that an officer of the regime should happen to pay a visit to the place. In this way, there would be no way to lodge a complaint against them, and they would be able to immediately turn to their work, despite the holiness of the Yom Kippur Day.

My neighbor, Kolishevsky, *Getzel der Kirschner* (the milliner), sat beside a sewing machine, and in front of him were cut sections of hats. He turned to me and said: "Look! All of the workers in our cooperative are good, loyal communists. Communist doctrine says, that whoever doesn't work, doesn't eat. Therefore, since we are not working today, we will accordingly not eat today either. Everything is according to communist doctrine!"

The Escape From German Occupied Territories

by Shlomit Becker-Laykin

I, Shlomit Becker, write these things in memory of my late father, Moshe Yitzhak, ז"ל of the Becker family, his mother, Shosha-Hama of the Zlotnitsky family, his father, Tuvia Becker, ז"ל my brother, Meir, ז"ל, who were murdered and wiped out by the Nazis.

The town of Zelva, my birthplace, where I was born in 1920, was located between nine large cities on the railroad line to Volkovysk, between Slonim and the provincial center at Bialystok. The town was surrounded by pine forests, where the young people of the town would go for picnics, particularly on *Lag B'Omer* in the summer season. The most noteworthy forest was the Bereshko Forest, approximately two kilometers from town. It was a pleasure to stroll through its leafy, entangled trees. It was the most beautiful of the forests in the area. Every Shabbat, the townsfolk would go into the forest to enjoy the fresh clean air, and the ambience. The forest also served as a meeting place for the young people who belonged to the Zionist movement. The residents of the town of Zelva were in part Jewish, and in part Christian farmers.

There were three schools in Zelva: The *Tarbut* School, The *Tachkemoni* (religious) School, and The General School. My late father was among the founders of the *Tarbut* School.

After I graduated from the *Tarbut* School, my parents sent me to Slonim to continue my studies at the Gymnasium run by Professor Kunita. Studies there were conducted in Polish. After completing my studies there, I returned to Zelva.

In 1939, the Russians captured Zelva. My mother Rachel, לֵרָא from the Marminsky family of Slonim, a graduate of a Russian teacher's seminary, wanted very much that I continue my studies, and in particular that I learn a profession, but she did not live to see this. She died suddenly, four months after the Russian invasion. I was left with the responsibilities of a mother to raise the children. My father, לֵרָא, devised an approach to the issue of the children, by sending me to Novogrudok to study accounting at the academy there, my sister, Chaikah, to study teaching at the teacher's seminary in Slonim, and my brother Meir לֵרָא, to Baranovich to study at the academy for railroad technicians, and my youngest brother, Yaacov, age ten, was left with my father in Zelva, and studied at a Russian school.

In 1941, after completing my studies, I did not return to Zelva. I married a young Jewish Russian man, who was a lecturer of mine at the academy, and then I brought my brother Yaacov and sister Chaikah to Novogrudok. One month later, on June 22, 1941, the war broke out.

My husband was drafted into the Red Army, but he was discharged a day later, to allow him to bring his family to a place that was further from the border. My husband succeeded in getting us as far as the railroad station in the city of Kritsyov. We proceeded under a hailstorm of bombardment, and I didn't think we would make it. There were many dead on the road to Minsk. Every minute, we saw death before our very eyes. In the end, we succeeded in covering the distance of 400 kilometers on foot, and my husband returned to the Red Army. We lived through a very difficult time, four years of suffering, but thank God, we survived. I managed to save my brother and sister from death. My objective was to bring them safe and sound back to my father.

I returned to Zelva after the war, in June 20, 1944, to locate my father and whatever relatives might have survived. In every place there was chaos and devastation. I could find no one who had survived, except for Shayneh Loshovitz, the daughter of Berel Loshovitz, לֵרָא. She told me how they had rounded up the Jews of the town of Zelva, who were carrying small bundles in their hands, weighing not more than a few kilograms, and they crowded them into stables and filthy barns, in which the crowding was awful; and in the end, loaded them into cattle cars transporting them to camps, and from there - to the gas chambers.

The objective of the Nazis was to dispose of the Jews in a clandestine manner, and they did this to six million Jews. However, we, the living, who have preserved the memory of our martyrs, inscribed in our hearts, now are entering our memories of them on the pages of this *Memorial Book* in order that they remain with us forever.

From Shayneh I learned that a relative of ours from Kolona Sini, Alter Becker, was in Dereczin. I travelled to visit him, and he told me about my father, who had fled to Kolona Sini, and was captured there by the Germans in July 7, 1941 where he was killed on the spot. Alter brought him back to be buried in Zelva. And in a like fashion, Alter told me that my brother Meir, returned to Zelva from Baranovich and lived in hiding for years with the Novish family, however, at the end of the war, he was informed on by the gentiles, and he was apprehended and executed.

As my mother's entire family from Slonim had emigrated to the Holy Land before the war, as early as 1935, I decided to send my brother, Yaacov with Alter Becker to Poland. From there, they went to Germany, and they entered the Holy Land in 1948 with the refugees aboard the ship, "Exodus." My sister and I and our families came to Israel in 1959. My son was twelve years old, and my daughter, two. My husband began work at a dyeing factory, and retired at age 65, and I turned to teaching. I studied at a teacher's seminary in Haifa in order to become a graduate teacher. I worked till age 60, and then retired.

My son graduated from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. He studied medicine, and today works at the Rambam Hospital in Haifa as an oral surgeon, and serves in the army as a Major. He is also a graduate of the Rubin Music Academy of Jerusalem. These studies he did in parallel with medical school.

My daughter graduated from the Harieli School in Haifa, and Haifa University, and is a graduate teacher of Biology. She decided to continue her studies at Tel Aviv University for a second degree in cancer research, and graduated successfully and began working on her Doctorate. She too, is a graduate of the Rubin Conservatory in Haifa, and is a pianist.

In 1962, when I completed my own studies, and began to work as a teacher at the *Geulim* School at *Kiryat Yam*, I volunteered to join a group to fight cancer as the secretary of the *Kiryat Yam* chapter. One needs to be born to public service. This inclination, I inherited from my parents, the founders of the *Tarbut* School in Zelva, and who helped look after charitable causes: warm meals for needy children, and in the winter: shoes and clothing.

My parents were Zionists, and from my earliest childhood, I was raised with the Zionist ideal. A portrait of Dr. Theodore Herzl hung in our home from the time I was born.

At this time I want to underscore the efforts of my husband, Laykin, who saved us from certain death. For this, he surely deserves our very special gratitude.

My relatives who were killed by the Nazis are:

My father's only sister, Rachel, who was married to Itchek Bereshkovsky.

Their oldest daughter, Judith, their son, Lyuba, and their daughter, Shlomit.

THE DESTRUCTION OF ZELVA

The Destruction of My Family

by Sala Koyat

It was not given to me to place even a small flower on the graves of my family, because I do not know where they are located. I think of my loved ones, that were destroyed, day and night, and I will not forget them so long as there is life within me.

I had three sisters and a brother, and three uncles from both my father and mother's side, and I beg their forgiveness for having left them in Zelva, and making *aliyah* to the Holy Land to fulfill the dream of my life.

It was in 1939, three months before the outbreak of the war, when all my ties to you were severed, and I heard nothing from you. Where did you go? There were among you, tiny youngsters who hadn't had the chance to have a taste of life, and what a brutal and bitter fate to which you were condemned! I cannot forgive myself, and occasionally I think that if I were only with you, and I was the oldest one, perhaps I could have helped to save some of you. This matter constantly interferes with my peace of mind, even though I am the mother of three children and a grandmother.

Oh, mother, I am today much older than you were when I last saw you. What sort of evil and bitter fate befell our family, as befell the rest of the members of our town. Not one single member of our family was saved, and I was left alone, without a relative with whom to eat, or speak, to simply chat, and with whom to exchange memories about our wonderful little town that we had - Zelva.

I remember every doorstep, every street, every nook, the place where I grew up, the place where I obtained a Jewish and Zionist education.

My father was an educated man. In the wintertime, he used to bind books and sacred texts. I remember seeing him absorbed in a book, reading and learning instead of working, and afterwards, he would tell it all to the children. He used to say to us: "children, learn and read a lot, because there is a great deal to learn"

We had a home that was very warm and full of love, and our parents always used to talk to us and tell us things.

I belonged to the *HaShomer HaTza'ir* movement. We thirsted after knowledge and understanding of the Holy Land. Our town was far from the big cities, and we were always thirsty for new ideas, but we had teachers and leaders who satisfied this need and we learned a lot from them.

Even though we had a meager sustenance in our household, the children all got their education at the *Tarbut* School.

Others have already written a great deal about our Zelva, and I won't repeat this.

With the encouragement of my parents, I left to prepare myself in order to accelerate the hour of fulfillment of our dream. There were parents, though, who were opposed to this approach.

It is now 45 years since I came to the Holy Land in June 1939 as part of *Aliyah Bet*. My life on the kibbutz was outstanding. I left the kibbutz, because I had the idea that I would leave the country after the end of the war to try and bring some of the children back to the land of Israel. To my great pain, all of this turned out to be in vain.

The first one to bring us any news of Zelve, was Moteleh Loshovitz, who visited the town after the war and found not a single person there. The wound is very great, and it will never heal. We take comfort in our land of Israel, that was established in our time, and we are commanded to guard her, and to persevere in building her up, and strengthen her for the sake of our children who will come after us!!!

We have to offer a *Yashir Koach* to our friend Yerachmiel Moorstein for his effort, his dedication, and his stubbornness to perpetuate the memory of our beloved town, and for putting down in writing its history, and a blessing too on all our other comrades, who lent a hand in this undertaking to produce this *Memorial Book*.

I pray that my children and grandchildren will read this sacred *Memorial Book*, and that they will learn about a chapter of the life of the Jewish Diaspora, and in its midst, the town of Zelve in which their mother, Sala Koyat was raised and educated.

Eliakim The Avenger

by Yerachmiel Moorstein

For their entire existence, the Jews suffered pogroms and persecutions, but could they conceive that in our lifetime in central Europe, that a cultured and advanced nation would rise up and come to Zelve, destroy its Jews, and erase the entire community without leaving so much as a trace?

Many of the young people in Israel, and elsewhere in the world ask this question, and return to this same question: how did such a thing happen, that complete communities of Jews were herded into gas chambers and crematoria and were destroyed without resistance? What were those Jews made of? Did they go like sheep to the slaughter?

From the pens of witnesses who survived this inhuman assault on life, these solitary survivors told and bore witness, and their stories are in this book, stories of heroism and sacrifice, especially in the camps of the partisans in the forest, there the Germans were unsuccessful in penetrating, despite their many divisions that were equipped with heavy artillery and ordnance.

In one of the [partisan] camps, which had about three hundred men, most of them from the town of Dereczin, the partisans carried out many sorties against the Germans, and inflicted many losses on them. They engaged mostly in railroad sabotage. The fighting with the Germans was bitter and fierce, and continued for 26 months, and from the entire camp, only about twenty men survived.

During the First World War, Eliakim was orphaned when his father did not return from the front. His mother fell ill, and she too passed away, leaving the young orphan boy to be raised by relatives. At that time there were no institutions such as orphanages. Like other boys his age, Eliakim received

his primary instruction at the *Heder* of Shlomo the Melamed. During recesses, the other children would play all sorts of games, but Eliakim hardly participated. He was always serious and lost in thought, and his large dark eyes seemed focused far away...

While he was still a youngster, Eliakim sought out a means of earning a livelihood, and since there wasn't much choice, he joined up with a group of wagoners, who used to haul wood from the forest to the train station. In time, he grew up to become a big strong man, and a talented horseman, who engaged in haulage. A good-hearted man, he was ever ready to use his strong muscles to help the weak, he was tough and brave in dealing with unruly people, and he always came out on top... during the days of the draft army, the gentile draftees used to cheer themselves with a "little" vodka, and from time to time, they would come into town and fall upon the stalls of the Jewish merchants in the marketplace, and at times like these Eliakim would show them the brawn of his arm, and he would inspire the Jews with his display of courage, returning the fight to its perpetrators, and these unruly [drunken soldiers] would be scattered all over.

When news reached the town that Jews were being rounded up from the neighboring towns, being brought to the horse stables of the cavalry in Volkovysk, and from there - being sent in sealed trains to an unknown destination, that night thirteen young men left to rendezvous in the forest armed with rifles, but very few got there. In the ruins of the city, there were few hidden survivors left, and among them was Eliakim. According to the story of a gentile neighbor, a German reached his doorstep to take him prisoner, and Eliakim jumped him and beat him with a steel rod until he killed him. He stripped the soldier of his weaponry, jumped on a horse, and began to ride through the fields to get cover in the forest, but after he emptied his magazine of ammunition, he was shot and killed, sanctifying the name of Israel with his death.

May His Memory Be Blessed!

The Suicides

by Yerachmiel Moorstein

Not all the Jews of the town were expelled and taken to the stables in Volkovysk and from there to the gas chambers and crematoria in Treblinka. There were those, who chose with courage to ... commit suicide. They chose "to remain" in the city of their birth, the city of their fathers and forefathers for many generations before them.

The most venerable was Reb Abba Poupko, in his role as the head of the community. Even during the First World War, he played this role for about three years, carrying out the orders of the occupation regime honestly and with justice, for the benefit of all sides, and even the occupying Germans respected him and placed value on his abilities, and in addition, he carried out his duties using the German language. After the Germans captured Zelva following the heavy bombing, which destroyed nearly all the houses in the city in its wake, and killed about eighty people, it was natural that they would appoint Abba Poupko to serve as head of the community. In July 1941, about twenty SS men arrived, and they ordered all the Jewish men to assemble in order to be counted, and to form into lines, and in front of them, they put a young woman down on a bench and proceeded to give her 24 lashes with a whip. This terrifying scene left a painful impression. The head of the SS explained that he has to follow his orders, and including the heads of the community, no - he had them shot! And in a similar fashion, he ordered, that all the teachers, among them my sister Sarah, the

accountants, rabbis and scholars, should step out of the line. To the question from these, for what purpose were they being selected, came the answer: knowledge work. They were taken to the Bereshko Forest, and after they dug pits, they were shot to death on the spot.

Jews were involved in all sorts of occupations, and because of their work, they were shot and killed. In front of all the citizenry, including the non-Jews, the Head Officer sentenced seven Jews to death by hanging. The Jews were ordered to erect gallows, and to sign an affidavit that they were all criminals and to carry out the hanging. Those hanged were: *David Vishnivisky, Joshua Niznitsky*, and five other Jewish refugees. The bodies were left hanging for three days.

According to what we have heard, Abba Poupko joined these seven martyrs and at the same time, and committed suicide.

The family of Reb Joseph and Shifra Shulman and their daughters were the owners of the biggest store in the center of town, and were counted among the most respected families of the community.

Reb Joseph had rabbinic ordination, and he occupied a prominent place in the *Moiehr* Synagogue where he used to pray. Between Mincha and Maariv, he would give a lesson in Talmud. Although he scrupulously observed the 613 commandments, his dress was that of a modern and contemporary man. He used to read a daily Hebrew newspaper, and he was a Zionist, who donated to various foundations in addition to the charities in town. The Jews respected him, and the Christian leadership, the *Poritzim*, the landed gentry of the area, sought association with him as an honest and straightforward individual, and patronized his magnificent store for all manner of things. He made a good living.

Reb Joseph, Shifra and his daughters were not driven out with a knapsack in hand. They committed suicide together in the cellar of their last abode, and remained somewhere in Zelva, the city of their birth.

*May Their Memory Be A Blessing Forever And Ever
Among The Rest Of The Martyrs Of The Jewish People!*

The Final Victim

by Yerachmiel Moorstein

In the typhus epidemic that spread through the town during the days of the German invasion [World War I], a mother of five children died, and the youngest of her children was named Malka. She was a tall, pretty girl, with blue eyes and long blond hair, which made her look Christian. She was gifted musically, and with her sweet, soft voice, she would perform lovely songs which enchanted all those who listened to her.

After three of the children grew up, they left the nest and got married, and Malka was left at home... She filled the place of her mother for the one sister who was younger than she was. Her father, a pious man who performed as a cantor during the High Holidays, used to work in the forest, and spent a great deal of his time away from home.

When Malka grew up and reached maturity, there were no suitors of her age and station in town,

because around that time, six young men had made *aliyah* to the Holy Land, others went to Russia, the United States and Argentina. Malka did not have much time to spend with those of her own age. One fine day, the city was stunned, and the news went from mouth to ear: Malka had run away with the young Polish policeman to his hometown, a village in the environs of Warsaw.

Several young men volunteered immediately to go and secretly seize her and return her to her home. After quite an adventure, they managed to tie up Malka, and after a considerable and tiring travail, they got her back home, broken and depressed.

At about the same time, a family of refugees reached the town and they settled there. One of their sons knew how to play the violin, and thanks to him, after many years, the sweet sound of romantic music spilled all over as he played.

According to the stories of the gentiles, Malka was the final victim, after she was [mistakenly] taken for a Christian, but one of the neighbors informed on her. The brutal Nazis dragged her out of a bed in the clinic, and after they raped her, they killed her. With this final victim, the tie between Zelva and her Jews was sundered.

Mordechai Loshovitz, a native of our town, heard about Malka's bitter end and shocking death from the gentiles in the town, when he visited en route to the Holy Land.

The Destruction Of Zelva
(*Jewish Daily Forward*)

Shmuel Yarnivsky

[Note: The following text is taken from an article that first appeared in *The Jewish Daily Forward*, Saturday, December 25, 1948. The original Yiddish text was translated into Hebrew by Yerachmiel Moorstein. It is this Hebrew text that is translated into English below].

When the war broke out in September 1939, the population was about 1800. With the strong influx of refugees, this number reached approximately 7000. All of these unfortunates were accepted with sincerity, they were placed in homes, and the townsfolk shared with them whatever food they had. Because of the great cold in the winter of 1939-40, epidemics of disease broke out, that resulted in many deaths. The people of the town accepted this without complaint. They continued to help the refugees with all the means at their disposal.

With the entry of the Red Army, the order of life was changed. Most of the refugees left the city, a part returned to Poland, in the German sector, and the other part drifted into the center of Russia.

Those that stayed behind, integrated themselves into town life, and continued with their lives until June 1941. From across the Polish border, the terrifying news of the mass murder of Jews began to reach us.

Close to this time, the following families were exiled into the depths of Russia: Borodetzky, Spector, Rotni, Moshe Lantzevitzky, Rabbi Kosovsky and others. Others went to Vilna in the hope of being able to cross the sea, and some did succeed, while others were exiled to Siberia.

On Sunday, June 22, 1941, the city was bombed without quarter, and burned continuously for three days, after which only a few lone houses remained standing. There were about 300 victims, among them my brother, Velvel. The dead were left unattended in the street without any opportunity to bury them because of the intense bombing. The Germans reached this terrible scene on June 26, immediately ordered all the survivors to gather in the city center, and ordered all the teachers and other people of intellectual pursuit, about 40 in number, to step forward, and according to the account of gentile witnesses, they were taken and shot in the forests in the Zelva vicinity. And in this fashion, the hell of hangings and shootings continued from day to day. Among those who were hanged were: David Vishnivisky, Joshua Niznitzky, and the remainder were refugees. Those that remained alive in the streets and in the few remaining houses, began to feel the awesomely terrifying doom begin to approach. They began to go out into the forests like the residents of neighboring Dereczin, but the Germans began to spread the word that nothing bad would befall the residents of Zelva, because the city now belonged to the Third Reich, and in the Reich, it is the responsibility of each person to work, and this representation mitigated against many of the young men from joining the partisans in the forest.

On November 20, 1942 an order was issued that all Jews were to leave Zelva and go to the armory in Volkovysk. There, a ghetto would be constructed for all the Jews of the area.

Very few escaped to the forests: Nathan Abalovitz, The brothers, Moshe and Katriel, their cousin, Nathan Slutsky, and Shayna Loshovitz. With the active participation of the Christian residents of the city, the expulsion of the Jews was accompanied by loud cries of "Hurrah." About 40 of them were tortured to death. Chaya Bublecki, a young girl of age 18, was taken out from a place of hiding, Eizik Kovlevsky from his home, and others.

In Volkovysk, the Jews were imprisoned in the camps of the armory in the cold, in hunger, and in unsanitary conditions. The old and the weak were put to death by gassing. Mottel Maggid, who lost both of his legs in the First World War, dug a hole in the ground for his head with his bare hands, and managed to remain alive until a German beat him over the head with a club and killed him.

The tragic end of the Jews of Zelva had begun. Day by day, people were taken to the extermination camps, Treblinka in particular. In the days of December 5-7, they were killed and annihilated in a terrifying manner, by inhuman torture, inflicted upon them by their *cultured* German murderers.

*On the Return from the War...
My Town, Zelva - In the Year 1957*

by Shmuel Kaninovitz
(Translated from Yiddish by Yerachmiel Moorstein)

- A. On the heels of the Hitlerian beast of prey, the bus continues to speed toward and get closer to places that are known to me, and are increasingly recognizable...

From here it isn't far, the Medukhova Forest in its green valley, into which we would go to celebrate *Lag B'Omer*. The forest would take us in, the young student boys, and we would spend pleasant times in its bosom, occupied in play and other activities.

- B. And here is the Bereshko Forest, in which we spent many a Sabbath, young boy and girl together... but sixteen years have past since that time. The forest hears the terrified shrieks of the Jews being murdered, they are the eternal visitors, the Rabbis, Teachers, Scholars, *Shochetim*... the forest has disappeared, the trees have been uprooted. A few remain as witnesses, repositories of the secrets of the lives lived by the generations...
- C. Here is the calm Zelvianka River, in which we would bathe during the hot summer. We were caressed by its clear and pure waters, which made life more pleasant, on the shore, in the grass, where we would get tanned, and make love... the shore has disappeared, the grass had been uprooted, and is no longer there. And also you, the paddlers and regular swimmers [are gone]. The waters still flow, with tears and blood...
- D. A small distance away - the train station. I left it in 1941. In June, my brother, Yaacov Moshe, my dearly beloved sisters, Chaya and Yenta, and many good friends and acquaintances. And no one even conceived that the Holocaust was drawing near, like a thief, that with the fury of a storm, would wipe out and erase the city in a fundamental way, and leave not a single Jew behind...
- E. On my way to my home town, I meet two elderly Christians. They tell me about the tribulations and the tortures. In one of the mornings in 1942, the *Murderers* assembled all the Jews with strings of pails tied to their hands, and drove them to the train station. The sick and the weak were packed into cattle cars. They were brought to the cemetery, shot, and their screams were heard over great distances...
- F. I return to the city in which I was born. My house is not there. It no longer exists. There is a bomb crater there. A short distance away lives Shayna Loshovitz, the sole survivor of all the Jews. She was saved from the hands of the *Murderers*. She went to the Minsk Forest to the partisans, and with an amazed look in her eyes, she recognized me only with great difficulty. And when the unfamiliarity faded, she told me about Moshe Slutsky, who several years before, had lost a leg fighting with the partisans. An emotionally moving meeting with Mottel Loshovitz, and with Alta and Foyka [Gelman]. It is possible to lose one's mind. They told how they were saved and remained alive, they fell on the graves of their beloved ones, they left broken-hearted, and they left the city of ghosts forever...

*May the German Murderers be remembered for all eternity in shame
and abomination, along with the Christian resident neighbors.*

The Liquidation of Zelva

by Ephraim (Foyka) Gelman
(original text in Yiddish)

Zelva! I, Ephraim Gelman, one who survived the destruction of our beloved town, will try to describe, though inadequately, what I recall of my youth up till that day about our town, Zelva, which was among the oldest towns in the area encompassing the broad plain of Poland, White Russia, and Palesia which was built on the banks of the Zelvianka River, from which lumber was floated from the Belevezer Palesian forests, and whose waters then cascade into the Neman river near Grodno, and from there to the Vistula Gulf, to Danzig, for export to foreign lands by ship, and Zelva was also the midpoint on the railway between Warsaw and Minsk!

Zelva, which was founded in the 1400's by the Polish aristocracy, also belonged to competing nationalities. Until the Russian Czar occupied Lithuania and Poland, and then the town belonged to Russia until 1914, and the First World War. Zelva, which was at a crossroads, derived its economic sustenance from wheat, which was sent out by train to port cities, where it was exported by ship to foreign lands. In Zelva, there were also large fairs, which were attended by merchants from Poland, Germany, and Russian Lithuania, who would come to buy horses and cattle which the peasants from the surrounding villages would come to sell. From this, half the town's storekeepers larger or smaller made a living, also quite a few merchants, and workers, such as shoemakers, tailors, milliners, carpenters, all could be found in our city, lived there and raised families, each according to his means.

Also, Zelva had manufacturing mills built on the river, driven by the waters of the Zelvianka. The Borodetzskys and Sedletzskys, who were the rich people in town [owned the mills]. The Borodetzskys owned the mill by the river, where hired help would come from the Belevezer forests, and in the factory, they worked the [raw material] over, making it suitable for building material, which was then sent by train to Poland and Germany. Also the millers would send wagons of flour to the larger cities. There were people, who had the means, and took up with wholesale trade, like the Bereshkovskys. Four brothers, Zalman, my brother-in-law, Jacob, Lieber and Yitzhak, Avremel, the Pashtiva's father, with two sons, Samuel Kaplan, the Sectors, father and sons. Larger storekeepers with more merchandise, and smaller storekeepers from whom they made a living! There were heads of households who were ordained rabbis, like Joseph Shulman, *Dayanim*, and also Jews who studied a page of the *Gemara* every day between *Mincha* and *Maariv* in the synagogues. There was a *Talmud Torah* that taught both poor students and those who paid tuition. There was a *Tarbut* School, a *Yavneh* School, a *Tarbut* Library from which the youth of the community benefitted. There were also organizations, such as *HaShomer HaTza'ir*, *HeHalutz*, *Mizrachi*, *Agudah*, and also the *Bund* and Communist circles. A city that breathed deeply with the knowledge of Zionism, from which our youth occupied no small place in the activities and kibbutzim of *HeHalutz*, *HaShomer HaTza'ir*, *Betar*, and also a portion of them worked in the central administrations of these organizations! In other cities, the youth urgently wanted to uproot themselves from their locales, but it was simply not possible for everyone to uproot themselves in this fashion and go to the Land of Israel to build and create, and it was truly a small portion that participated in the building up of our land, Israel.

I must also recall specific people from our town, who were the organizers of our culture and the foundation of our Jewish heritage, as manifested in our synagogues and Zionist organizations. Chaim Rosenbloom, the director of *Tarbut*, Shmuel Boruch Freidin, and Rabbi Joseph Shulman from *Mizrachi*, and others as well, and my classmates what we learned together in such organizations as

Keren Kayemet, the *Tarbut* Library, which was a part of our library which a group of us young people established in 1921/22 which we named *HaTehiya*. The group consisted of the friends, Moshe Rafilovitz, Yerachmiel Moorstein, Mordechai Perlmutter, "Sholom Langer and Ezekiel Kaplan," who are in Argentina, Zelig Nivick, and also, Ephraim Gelman, Shmuel Yarnivsky. This was the impetus to bind us to *Tarbut*, and from this, the Library was created from which the youth of the town drew the spirit of Zionism. Also from the *Keren Kayemet* Committee, I must recall those who worked together: Yerachmiel Moorstein, Mordechai Perlmutter, Moshe Rafilovitz, Moshe Futritzky, Eliezer Futritzky, and also Ephraim Gelman, and [Dr.] Nahum Gelman, director. And that's how life went on. We got older, and grew up to be a youth which set itself to work in facilitating its ability, and preparing itself to go to the Land of Israel, among which are those here in our Land. Not to mention all the others, like my brother Joseph, who was in preparation, my sister, Liza, who belonged to *HaShomer HaTza'ur*, also my brother Noah, and many others, about whom it is difficult to write about, from our beloved town Zelva, acquainted with its residents, friends who stayed behind, vanished in smoke and fire, young and old alike, children, who didn't even have a chance to see the world. I will not sufficiently impart to the world and my friends, the nature of the struggle that our brothers and sisters waged for their lives under the murderer Hitler, may his name be eradicated, and for our town, Zelva, which no longer exists for us.

28 Nov 1983

In 1933, when Hitler came to power, the entire foundation of Europe was shaken, and along with it, Poland. Anti-Semitism also increased sharply. Many Jewish businesses were confiscated, also in Zelva. Young people tried desperately to get out of our city, those who had good fortune were able to reach the Land of Israel, Canada, and Argentina, but these were the minority. In September 1939, Hitler's war machine marched into Poland, and because of his pact with Stalin, they divided Poland, so that up to Bialystok, the territory remained in German hands, and the territory up to Minsk, that is, White Russia, went to Russia, for which we Zelva Jews thanked God. The new regime began to promulgate its laws, which caused us Jews the greatest distress. The more likely ones, and opposition party people, like Zionists, lived in fear of being deported as political prisoners of the state. As life under the communist regime began to crystallize, both forms of the schools were changed to Russian and Byelorussian, and specific teachers took up specific subjects such as Metek [Mordechai] Basyuk. My brother-in-law, Liza's husband, became inspector of the schools in the *Район* [district] that is Zelva and its environs. We acquiesced to the fate of living under the new regime, which we thought would be permanent. The regime arrested the richer, well-to-do families, like the Borodetskys, Sectors, Wallsteins, Moshe Lantzevitzky and his family, and sent them to Siberia. Also, it was very difficult to get work if you were previously a merchant, and as a result, I traveled to find work in Bialystok. [I worked there] after having obtained a passport from the Soviet regime as a worker, and up to six months before the outbreak of the war in 1941, after which I returned to Zelva, where I worked up to June 1941, when Hitler's army marched into Zelva after 14 days.

The fighting that took place between the German army and the Soviet army, which became surrounded, caused the town of Zelva to be eradicated, leaving behind only solitary wrecked buildings. During this fighting, there were 80 dead and wounded casualties among the Jewish citizenry of the town, but we had no idea of the terrible misfortune that was yet to come. Three days after the occupation, the Gestapo came to town, and ordered all the men to register themselves with the authorities, and I was among all of these. It has fallen to me to be the witness of what transpired in the next three hours. We lost 40 of our best intelligentsia from all of Zelva. And that is the way they

[the Gestapo] conducted themselves on entry into every city and town, taking away the intelligentsia, so that there will be no one to organize the life of the Jewish community. They took them away by mechanized transport to the Bereshko Forest, and shot all of them. From that day on, under the direction of the Polish Jugend Polizei, they ordered with their active help, the liquidation of the Jewish population of Zelva.

Hunger and deprivation was great, because neither food nor other necessities were available any longer. Everything had been burned up. Only one thing: we did not have a Judenrat, with Jewish police, as was the case in other Polish cities. And in this fashion, we lived in cellars, in constant fear and fatigue, and to earn enough for a little bread, one had to risk one's life. A few butchers, who were caught selling meat, were hung in the middle of the street in the marketplace. The Jewish population was ordered to come and witness the execution. This is the way they lived in fear for one and a half years, until after Succoth of 1942.

They then gathered all the Jews of Zelva, and the Jews from around Volkovysk, and brought them to the stockade in Volkovysk, the stockade for the Russian prisoners of war that were all shot. To a man, they rounded up all the Jews from the surrounding towns, among them Zelva, and from there they were transported to Treblinka, where they were all gassed to death.

Those who saved themselves were Moshe Slutsky, and his brother, Katriel, Leizer Yankel *Lantzevizky's*, Nathan Chana, *the Butcher's*, and those who escaped into Russia in 1941, and those who are today found in Israel, Canada, Argentina, Australia, about 20 to 25 people. And that is how our Zelva community was liquidated, *that was six hundred years old*. The story of my survival with my family belongs to a separate chapter. Among those taken out [and shot to death] in the Bereshko Forest, was Shmuel Boruch Freidin, and other teachers.

My Family

by Ephraim Gelman

Now, about me and my family! After Hitler's army marched into Zelva on July 6, 1941, and the city lay in ruins, we lived up to four families in a cellar. As a result, I, my wife and two children went to nearby Dereczin, because there was more housing stock there, and the town had not suffered as greatly from the bombing. After living for seven months in Dereczin, we returned to Zelva, because they had begun to construct a ghetto, and in Zelva a ghetto was never constructed. While we were not burned and killed during the battle, we could not stay in Zelva for very long, because we were not on any of the lists of the Jewish residents in town. At any time, we were at risk of being discovered and shot, and the Jews with which we were staying arranged for us to go to Volkovysk, where we were taken in. There, I worked building wagons, fourteen and sixteen hours a day, living six families to a house, amidst great hunger and deprivation.

About four months later, after Succoth, when they had already started to round up the Jews from Volkovysk and surrounding towns, in order to exterminate them by gas in Treblinka, an opportunity presented itself to us to slip out of town by night, and through fields and forests, which took us ten days, we arrived at the forests between Dereczin and Zhitel, to the camp of the Russian partisans whose ranks already contained both young and old men from Dereczin, who had run off from the slaughter in Dereczin. They had about 150 horses, in addition to women and children. There, I met up with Moshe Slutsky and his brother, Katriel, and Nathan *Hannah Slutsky's*, who saved themselves, escaping from Zelva on the day of the liquidation. That is how we entered the partisan camp, under Bulak's command, and we lived under military discipline for the 26 months until July 14, 1944. Our Jewish group excelled in the war against the Germans in railway sabotage, destroying railroad bridges, and attacking patrols that guarded the railways, in order to revenge the forgotten blood of our brothers and sisters, and that's how we lived through the 26 months of war against the Germans, during which time, the Jewish group sustained upwards of 80% casualties among those who fought against the Germans.

On July 14, 1944, we were liberated by the Russian Army. We came out of the forests and returned home to Zelva. Desolate, empty, rubble, no residents, no homeowners, no synagogues, no schools, there are no relatives, no friends, no one left from our municipal family. But life must go on. Slowly, we obtained a room where we could lie down and get some rest. The gentile population was not happy to see us, because we were the sole surviving witnesses to their murderous handiwork, and they could not use the things that they had robbed from the Jews out of fear that we would recognize the items! Coming back, we also met up with Mordechai Loshovitz, who saved himself, and returned to the wreckage in Zelva. We were extremely happy to find Mottel Loshovitz, and we did for him as best we could. In September 1945, we left Zelva, and through Lodz, we went to Austria, where by fleeing we reached Salzburg-Linz, where we began to lead a normal existence. The children started to go to school with other Jewish children.

We lived this way in Austria from 1945 to 1951. We immigrated to America, where we are today a family of children and grandchildren, for which we give thanks to God to this day. But we will never forget our destruction. There is a hurt in the heart for my brothers and sisters, friends, family, my town of Zelva and her martyrs, all who gave their lives to sanctify the Lord's name, with their battle and will to live, which all of us who remained alive will simply never, ever forget.

As a member of the partisans, I was also designated to assume responsibility for providing food from

time to time for a small group of women and children who today live in Israel and America. There were four girls in this group, my wife's brother's children, who today are in Israel, and they have lovely families with children.

The Fate of My Immediate Family in Poland

by Joseph Kaplan

My father, Jekuthiel Kaplan, is believed to have lived in Zelva until the final end of the Jewish community in Zelva.

My grandmother, Chana, is believed to have died in Zelva about 1940.

My sister, Beileh Goldin, is believed to have lived in Zelva until the final end of the Jewish community of Zelva.

Beileh's husband, Ephraim, was mobilized into the Polish army, and was apparently killed in action.

Their son, Eliezer, was born about 1936 or 1937, and is believed to have lived in Zelva until the final end of the Jewish community of Zelva.

My brother, Theodore, married and lived in Skidel, near Grodno. He, his wife, and daughter, born during the early 1930's, have apparently perished with the Jewish community of Skidel.

The Last Visit to Zelva in 1965

Chuma Zhchinsky
abstracted from the Yiddish
by Yerachmiel Moorstein

With the end of the First World War, and with the coming of the October Revolution of 1917, Czar Nicholas II was overthrown, and in his place, a Soviet Regime was established in which there were prominent leaders from our people. They called to the Jews to embrace the tenets of communism, on whose flag was etched the words: justice, equality, and even-handedness. Several of the youth of Zelva responded to this call, and they went to Moscow, among them, Akiva Z[hchinsky]. In a few years, his sister, Chumka, left home to follow in his footsteps, and she too crossed the border, first joining a hospital as a nurse, and in time - as a doctor. During the Second World War, she gave aid to the many countless wounded. After the war, several families from our town who lived close to her went to our Land, and maintained contact through letter correspondence. It was through these letters that she became aware that the members of her town that had settled in Tel Aviv were planning to commemorate the martyrs of our town by publishing a *Memorial Book*. This matter moved her very greatly, and stirred a very strong yearning in her that gave her no rest.

She turned to me with these words:

Greetings to my honored Yerachmiel!

It is over fifty years since I left home, but my recollections return to me as if these things happened just yesterday, and before my eyes, my parents stand, my friends and my companions. In 1941 I visited Zelva. Little was left of the houses as they were, and the same as regards the residents. Everyone came out to greet me. I saw my mother for the last time. My brother, Mottel, was a prisoner of war, and I used to send him food parcels. He was killed in Maidanek in a camp of 3000 soldiers. I am enclosing a copy of his picture, and I ask you to preserve it [in your Memorial Book].

In 1965, I visited a second time with my brother Akiva. I thought that I would be able to pay my respects at my mother's grave, but to our great sorrow, the cemetery no longer exists. In its place is a soccer stadium, and what used to be the center of town is now a public garden. All that is left are churches, and one Jewish woman and her child...

I wanted very much to participate in this sacred undertaking, in the publication of this book, in substance and in spirit, but sadly, it is not within my means to do so...

Perhaps the dream to be united with you and all the members of the town will yet come true, to talk to one another...

With best regards to all of you, and with hope to see each other.

VICTIMS OF THE HOLOCAUST

To The Reader

by Yerachmiel Moorstein

In White Russia, on the banks of the Zelvianka River, in the Grodno Province, on the rail line from Warsaw to Moscow, there was a city in which about two thousand Jews lived for hundreds of years, simple people, who made do with very little, who worked hard for their meager sustenance, and observed the *mitzvot* of the Torah, among them spiritual people, that were inclined to a love of Israel, a life of tradition, honesty and justice. The few who were well off, took care of the poor, the sick and the widowed. The creative and educational life was centered in the synagogues, that were overflowing with Torah scrolls, scholarly works, and it was from them that the people drew comfort and hope of salvation.

At the end of the First World War, when the Balfour Declaration was announced, most of the people believed that this was the beginning of the Messianic era, and the youth began preparing itself in various ways to fulfill the Zionist ideal, and to make *aliyah* to the Land of Israel.

Yet, only very few accomplished this. The remainder were interdicted by the terrorizing Nazis, and their accomplices, our neighbors, who killed and burned them, and the survivors were herded off to horse stables in Volkovysk.

In the winter of 1942, they were roused in a deep snowfall, and in their tattered clothing, were hauled into death trains which brought them to Treblinka. There, they were taken into gas chambers where they were suffocated to death, and then cremated, and all that was left of them were piles of ashes... only very few were saved from the death camps, these were the partisans who came to us, in order that we do all that is in our power to preserve the sanctified memory of our brothers and sisters. And, indeed, this is what we are doing. We are assembling the names of our dear ones, and we are entering them in the annals of martyrs and heroes. And now, reader of this book, bow your head as a sign of mourning and respect in memory of these innocent souls that were destroyed in the terrible Holocaust.

The List of the Holocaust Victims of Zelva

[The list in the original text was alphabetized in Hebrew. This list has been re-arranged to be in English alphabetical order for ease of reference.]

A name followed by an asterisk (*) indicates that the *entire family* that goes with this name was destroyed.

Alpert, Israel, Michal, Tzipa, Rivkah *

Becker, Tuvia *

Becker, Moshe Yitzhak *

Beckenstein, Jacob Chaim *

Bereshkovsky, Friedel *

Bereshkovsky, Zalman *

Bereshkovsky, Yitzhak *

Bereshkovsky, Jacob *

Bereshkovsky, Abraham and Rasha
(of the Slutsky family) *

Bliecher, Zvi *

Blizniansky, Yitzhak *

Blizniansky, Mottel and Hinda

Beckenstein, Leib *

Bobovik, Zeidel *

Bobovik, Shmeril *

Bobovik, Mottel *

Borodetzky, Herzl *

Borodetzky, Zevulun (Zavel) *

Borodetzky, Hillel *

Borodetzky, Israel *

Boyarsky, Zvi *

Boyarsky, Eliezer *

Bublecki, Jejna*

Chazan *

Chilovitzky, Menahem and Zlota, Esther,

Moshe, Yehuda, Leibel, Frumah, Dora

Dubchinsky *

Dumbrovsky, Alter *

Eliovitz, Jekuthiel *

Einstein *

Fishkin, Moshe *

Fishkin, Leizer *

Freidin, Yitzhak Jonah *

Freidin, Shmuel Boruch and Hannah

Freidin, Joseph and Esther

Freidin, Yitzhak and Atarah

Futritzky, Berel, Beileh, Sonia, Jacob, Bella,
Mindel

Gelman, Moshe *

Gelman, Liza *

Gelman, Joseph *

Gerber, Moshe, Feigel and their son, Yitzhak

Gerber, Yitzhak Nahum

Gerzuk, Jacob *

Goldberg, Jacob *

Grazvisky *

Iber, Leib *

Iber, Isaac

Ilvitzky, David

Inderstein *

Inditzky *

Kaninovitz, Michel, Chana, Chaya, Yenta,

Jacob Moshe

Kaplan, Jekuthiel *

Kaplan, Todras *

Kaplan, Shammai and Taibel *

Kaplan, Samuel *

Kaplinksky, Leib *

Klotnitzky, Aharon, Rivkah, Lyuba, Melech,

Menuha, Ziesel, Sarah

Koleshevsky, Getzel and Basha, Feigel

Konkevitz *

Kottlierisky, Rivkah

Kozlovsky, Jedediah *

Kozlovsky, Samuel *

Kreiness *

Krisnovisky, Samuel *

Kubelsky, Isaac *

Lafin, Raphael and Rachel *
 Lansky, Joseph *
 Lansky, Chaim
 Lantzevitzky, Samuel *
 Lantzevitzky, Joel *
 Lantzevitzky, Aharon *
 Lantzevitzky, Jacob *
 Lantzevitzky, Yitzhak *
 Lantzevitzky, Hillel *
 Lev, Chaim and Ida *
 Levine, Chana
 Levine, Peretz *
 Levine, Shimshon *
 Lifshitz, Gershon *
 Lifshitz, Mordechai *
 Lifshitz, Nathaniel *
 Lifshitz, Nissan
 Lipsky *
 Lisitzky *
 Loshovitz, Berel *
 Loshovitz, Chaim *
 Loshovitz, Moshe *

Maggid, Chaim *
 Maggid, Mottel
 Meitzik *
 Melamed, Chaim *
 Merrill, Reuben *
 Minsky, Sholom *
 Minsky, Bezalel *
 Moltzedesky *
 Moorstein, Shifra and Sarah
 Moskovisky, Ephraim *
 Moskovisky, Shabtai *
 Moskovisky, Velvel *
 Motlovisky, Kalman *

Nosatsky, Shayna, Sarah, Simeon, Rachel
 Novickovsky, Chaim *
 Novick *
 Noznitzky, Rachel Leah, Shlomo, Michal,
 Asher, Chaim*

Peikovitz, Shlomo *
 Peskin, Gruna
 Pintlivitz, Moshe *
 Pintlivitz, Michel *
 Pintlivitz, Fishel *

Plonsky, David and Rachel
 Plonsky, Simeon
 Poltzik, Chaim Shlomo *
 Pomerantz, Shmuel Yossel *
 Potztiveh, Abraham *
 Potztiveh, Noah *
 Potztiveh, Hannan [Elchanan] *
 Poupko, Abba *

Rafilovitz, Ephraim and Tzipa
 Rafilovitz, Moshe and Bashka *
 Ravitz, Pesach, Tzeitel
 Ravitz, Yitzhak David, Chana
 Ravitz, Rivkah, Hillel
 Ravitz, Velvel *
 Ravitz, Shabtai, Simeon *
 Ratner, Eliezer *
 Ratner, Hillel *
 Rosenberg, Akiva *
 Rotni, Elihu Chaim, Gittel, Samuel, Jacob
 Rusiansky *

Sakorovsky, Elihu *
 Sakarnik, Malka and Leizer
 Sedletsky, Leizika *
 Sedletsky, Benny *
 Sedletsky, Dr. Jacob *
 Sedletsky, Chava *
 Selman, Yehuda and Freda, Rivkah and
 Zalman
 Selman, Katriel, Alteh, Deborah, Sonia,
 Joseph, Zalman
 Selman, Zvi and Leah, Zalman, Benny,
 Yitzhak, Batia
 Shapiro, Motti
 Shevach, Deborah and Leah
 Shevach, Jekuthiel *
 Shilovitzky, Nahum Itcheh, Freydeh Leah
 Ephraim, Abraham, Shabtai, Berel
 Shoysky, Dov *
 Shturmakevitz, Attel
 Shulman, Joseph, Shifra and daughters
 Shulyak, Moshe, Lipman, Bashka *
 Shulyak, Eliezer and Sula *
 Shulyak, Itcheh and Beilkeh *
 Shulyak, Frumah
 Shulyak, Blumah
 Shulyak, Sarah Rivkah *

Shulyak, Benjamin and Esther *

Slutsky, Yitzhak *

Slutsky, Gedalia

Slutsky, Shayna

Slutsky, Shachna *

Slutsky, Abraham *

Slutsky, Saul *

Slutsky, Mordechai, Hannan, Ephraim, Nathan,
Nehama*

Spector, Leib

Srybnik, David and Esther, Rivkah, Rosa,
Zalman

Vishniatzky, Mordechai, Shifra and son, Moshe

Vishniatzky, Elihu *

Vishniatzky, Ephraim *

Vishnivisky, Jacob and Sarah

Vishnivisky, David, Sarah Rivkah *

Vishnivisky, Leib, Sarah *

Vishnivisky, Tuvia *

Vishnivisky, Ephraim *

sons - Lipman, Mottel

daughter - Rivkah

Vishnivisky, Chaim *

Vishnivisky, Mula *

Vishnivisky, Moshe Fishel *

Wallstein, Yitzhak and Nacha *

Wallstein, Jacob and Mina

Weissbord, Abraham *

Yablonovsky, Pesach *

Yarnivisky, Leibush, Mottel, Rachel, Velvel*

Yarnivisky, Samuel *

Zackheim, Menahem, Sarah Feiga *

son - Moshe

Zackheim, Avigdor and Sonia

Zalman, Chaim *

Zelikovitz, Bezalel, Sarah *

Zelikovitz, Mordechai, Golda, Jacob, Abraham

Zhchinsky *

Zhchinsky, Mottel

Zlotnitzky, Leib and Leah, Getzel, Jacob,
Mindel

Zlotnitzky, Yitzhak *

Zlotnitzky, Alter

כי-מדי לפרי בו
זכר אֲזַכְּרֶנּוּ עוֹד
עַל כֵּן הָמוּ מֵעִי לוֹ
רוּחַם אֲרֻחֵמֶנּוּ לְאִם-יִי:

"...For even when I speak against him, I remember him with affection; therefore, My heart yearneth for him, yea I will surely have compassion upon him, saith the Lord."

Jeremiah 31:20

SURVIVING FAMILIES

A List of Zelva Natives Who Emigrated to Other Countries

(In English Alphabetical Order)

Russia

Kaplan, Chaim
Kaplan, Benjamin
Kaplan, Pinchas
Kaplan, Haddas
Kaplan, Leibel
Peskin, Bezalel
Peskin, Mindel
Ravitz
Slonimsky
Zachinsky, Chuma

Australia

Borodetzky, Herzel
Slutsky, Samuel (deceased)
Slutsky, Paula (deceased)
Slutsky, Beracha
Slutsky, Moshe
Slutsky, Joseph
Spector, Sandor
Spector, Jacob (deceased)

United Kingdom (London)

Yablon (Yablonski), Harry

United States

Einstein, Jacob Moshe
Epstein, Lanz-Dina
Gerber, Faygel
Kaplan, Joseph
Lantzevitsky, Lanz-Leibel
Nosatsky
Perlmutter, Abraham (deceased)
Perlmutter, Mordechai (deceased)
Perlmutter, Meir
Perlmutter, Jacob
Slutsky, Moshe (deceased)
Slutsky, Katriel (deceased)

Chile

Novick, Guttel
Novick, Yitzhak
Novick, Zelig
Novick, Nahum

Argentina

Barkleid, Berel
Barkleid, Chaim
Borodovsky, Hillel
Kaplan, Ezekiel
Kaplan, Chaim
Lansky, Nissan
Lipsky, Yerachmiel
Scharfstein, Chaim
Shoysky, Jedediah

Canada

Buchhalter, Barka (Helman)
Dombrovsky Family, Benny (*Alter Arevitcher*)
Eisen, Zelda (daughter of Joseph Motloff)
Frum, Barbara[deceased] & Murray (great-grandson of the *Dayan* [Jacob Futritzky])
Gelman (Helman), Roz (wife of Joseph [deceased]) & Family
Gelman (Helman), Sarah (wife of Abba [deceased]) & Family
Gelman (Helman), Lilly (wife of Ephraim, (*Foyka*), [deceased]) & Family
Karvitzky (brothers) (grandsons of Syma the Smith)
Lantzevitzky, Moshe and Sarah Itkeh
Marciano (daughter of Shmuel Yarnivsky)
Motloff, Joseph and Jacob (Motlovsky)

Pruber, Ethel (daughter of Abraham Gelman [Helman]) & Family
Schur, Rachel (daughter of Abraham Gelman (Helman)) and Family
Shapiro, Liebeh - wife of Jacob (deceased)
Shapiro, Abraham & daughter
Vigod, Sam (grandson of Leitzkeh Einbinder)
Waxman, L. and Sarah (daughter of Mendel Shapiro) served as Head of B'nai Brith
Yarnivsky, Shmuel (deceased)

Zelva Natives Who Went to Israel & Their Families

(In English Alphabetical Order)

<u>Year</u>	<u>Family Name</u>
1926	Barkleid - Ben-Zvi, Rachel, the children: Zvi, Yisrael - Miriam, Shimon - Michal
1939	Bar-Nur (Ravitz), Deborah and Dov, the children: Sarah Robinson-Ben Zion, Zila Weiss-Yossi, Benjamin Bar-Nur - Iris
1939	Bar-Tov (Kointovsky), Anshel (deceased), his wife Sarah, their children: Ehud, Aryeh, Yisrael, Leah
1936	Blicher (Bar Am), Samuel, and his wife Leah, their children: Joseph, Amos
	Blutreich (Kointovsky), Bella, her children Uzi, Ark, Dalit
	Brand, Eugenia (Moshkovsky), the children: Esther, Ephraim, Osnat
1935	Feinstein (Moorstein) Batia, her husband Meir (deceased), the children: daughter, Shafira and her husband Yitzhak, grandchildren: Liat, Shiri; daughter Sarah (deceased), grandchildren: Orit, Michal, Paz
	Feldman (Becker), Chaya, and her husband
1935	Freidin, Aharon (deceased), his wife Miriam, the children: Dr. Nahum, Rachel, Irit
1935	Freidin, Yehoshua, his wife Chaya, the children: Avraham, Sarah
1935	Freidin, Moshe, his wife Shoshana, the children: Zvi, Malka
1935	Geiger (Srybnik), Dora, her husband Moshe (deceased), the children: Gila, Dan
1973	Gelman, Dr. Nahum, his wife Sophie (deceased), the children: Boruch Koppel, Toby
1933	Gilony (Freidin), Chaim Jonah and his wife Rena (deceased), the children: Riva, Ammihud, Yair, Leah
	Gilboa, Jacob (Moshkovsky)
1926	Halperin, Chaim Ezekiel, and his wife, and three daughters
	Inditzky, Dr. Alter and his wife Paula, son Boris
1935	Kahn (Shulik), Ophra, her husband, the children: Amir

Kaninovitz, Tzippora

Kaninovitz, Tzipa (Eisen)

Kaninovitz, Samuel, and his wife Olga.

Klutznick, Dr. Amalia (daughter of Ephraim Vishnitzky), the children: Nili

1939 Koyat, Sala, her husband Aryeh, the children: Migo, Menahem, Zulia

Kozlovsky, Aryeh, his wife Sonia, the children: Chana, Zohar, Boaz

1932 Lantzevitzky, David (deceased), his wife Dina, the children: Boaz, Jacob, Adah

Laykin (Becker), Shlomit (daughter of Moshe Yitzhak Becker) and her husband, the children: Tanya, Moshe

Lefin, Abraham, his wife Rachel, the children: Chana, Ruth, Ayala

Levine (Kozlovsky), Sarah (daughter of Samuel), her husband Avigdor, the children: Yisrael, Hanoach, Nahum

Levine, Menahem, his wife Dina, the children, Samuel, Moshe

Loshovitz, Mordechai, his wife Zipporah, the children: Tzivya, Ze'ev

Makovsky, Jacob, son of Chana Sedletsky, his wife Kona, the children: Chava, Miriam

Makovsky, Joseph, son of Chana Sedletsky, his wife Ava, the children: Irit

1933 Meiner, Chaya (Srybnik), her husband Eliezer (deceased), the children: Joseph, Esther, Duda

1939 Merrill, Aharon (deceased), his wife Hasia, the children: Samuel, Naftali, Zvika (deceased)

Miller, Aryeh, his wife Chaya, the children: Zahava, Ze'ev

Miller, Shimon, his wife Rachel, the children: Bella

Minsky (Grunberg), Baba and her husband Jacob, the children: Tzafrir, Dan

1935 Moorstein, Yerachmiel, his wife Chana, the children: Nitza, Aviah, Dorit, Jacob

Moscovisky, Faygel, and her husband, Ephraim (deceased)

- Nosatsky, Ze'ev, his wife Elka, the children: Rivkah, Adi
- Nosatsky, Jacob, his wife Esther, the children: Eldad
- Ofek, Mordechai - Skorobovsky
- 1946 Peskin, Abraham (deceased), his wife Chana, the children: Aliza, Bosemet
- Peskin, Beni (sons?) Jacob
- 1928 Pomerantz, Mordechai, his wife Tova, the children: Michal, Nili, Tovit
- Pomerantz, Yitzhak (deceased), his wife Alla, the children: Sarah, Samuel
- Rafilovitz, Pesach (deceased, son of Ephraim and Tzipa), his wife Rachel, the children: Tzafrira, Ephrat, Bat-Zion
- 1937 Ritz (Futritzky), Eliezer (deceased), his wife Manya, the children: Odded (wife Jocheved), Maxima (husband Eli-Emil)
- Rogozin, Milrad, son of Masha, daughter of Abraham Shapiro
- 1929 Root (Shulik) Rivkah (deceased), her husband, the children: Aryeh
- Rotni, Aharon, his wife Fradel, the children: Leah, Shimon (deceased)
- 1935 Sabarov (Freidin), Miriam, her husband Samuel, the children: Roni, Uri, Yoram
- Shafrai (Borodetsky), Sima, her husband, the children: Tova, Naftali-Herzl
- 1948 Shalev (Shulyak), Yitzhak, and his wife Adina
- Shpitz (Zlotnitzky), Ahuva
- Slutsky, Chaim, his wife Hadassah, the children: Gad, Sarah, Rachel
- 1945 Talmon (Torczynski) Zlotnitzky Hadassah, and her husband, the children: Lilly, Dalia, Benny
- Uryon (Futritzky) Moshe (deceased), his wife Malka, children Uzi and Dalia
- Vishnitzky, Joseph, the son of Shifra and Mordechai, the children: Gideon, Moti
- Vishnitzky, Emanuel and Zhenia, the children: Deborah, Shafirah, Eliezer
- Wallstein, Joseph, and his wife, a daughter and son
- Wansower (Shoysky), Sarah, the children: Ammi, Benjamin, Yitzhak

1930	Zakai, Havivah, the daughter of Chana and Israel Grunberg, her husband and children: Hanan, Uzi
1933	Zelikovitz, Asher and his wife, the children: Sarah, Zvi
1939	Zelikovitz, Isser and his wife, the children: Yehudit, Sarah, Dov

Zelva Natives Who Died in Israel

Bar-Am, Shmuel (Blicher)
Bar-Tov, Anshel (Kointovsky)
Ben-Zvi, Rachel (Barkleid)
Borodetzky, Rachel

Dimant, Leah (Shulyak)

Freidin, Yitzhak
Freidin, Malka

Geiger, Moshe
Goldberg, Meir
Grunberg, Israel
Grunberg, Chana
Grunberg, Tzippora

Inditzky, Alter

Kaplinsky, Eliezer

Lantzevitzky, David

Meiner, Eliezer
Merril, Aharon
Merril, Zvi
Mintz, Abraham

Novikovsky, Jacob

Peikowitz, Hania
Peskin, Abraham
Pomerantz, Tuvia
Pomerantz, Batia
Pomerantz, Yitzhak

Rafilovitz, Pesach
Ratner, Shabtai
Ritz, Eliezer (Futritzky)
Root, Rivkah (Shulik)
Rotni, Shimon

Uryon, Moshe (Futritzky)

Wallstein, Jacob
Wallstein, Raizel

Zlotnitzky, Mordechai

Blessed Be Their Memory !!

RESIDENTS OF OUR TOWN IN THE LAND OF ISRAEL

The Aliyah of Families

by Yerachmiel Moorstein

After the Balfour Declaration, loyal and idealistic Zionists began to dream of the realization of Zionism: to go to the Land of Israel! These were young people, like Ezekiel Halperin, Menahem Levine, Rachel Barkleid (may she rest in peace), and Eliezer (Futritzky) Ritz, may he rest in peace. Every one of them invested considerable effort before they were able to reach the land to which they aspired. It took Menahem Levine nearly two years to reach the Holy Land.

My uncle, a Zionist sympathizer, was on the staff of the newspaper, *Tzefira*, and nonetheless, considered me something of an idler for my aspirations to make *aliyah*. His argument was: "What will you do there in the desert, where there is no rain? "What will you accomplish? Look, there are no gentiles there..."

We were surprised to hear that one of those who decided to make *aliyah* was a member of the *Poalei Zion* of the "Borochov" school, the carpenter, the elder Yisroel Grunberg, who also a head of a family.

It was our pleasure to see this fortunate family off: Yisroel, Hannah, the talented and charitable daughters: Tzipporah, Zahavah, Baba, and Havivah, and with all our hearts, we prayed for their well-being during the severe depression that gripped the Holy Land at that point in time.

The second family that made *aliyah* was the Pomerantz family: Tuvia, his wife, and their three sons, Mordechai, Samuel, and Ze'ev, who helped found kibbutzim, Mordechai - at *Givat Shelosha*, and Samuel - at *Givat Chaim*.

An additional family was able to make *aliyah* because of the efforts of their oldest son, Chaim Jonah Freidin (today called Chaim Gilony, a lawyer). Chaim attempted to reach the Holy Land the first time illegally, and was seized in Lebanon, and returned with his entire group to Poland. The second time, he succeeded in reaching the Holy Land while still less than 18 years of age. Because of his efforts, and thanks to his stubbornness, he succeeded by various means to cause his parents and the rest of his family to come to the Holy Land as well: the parents, Malka and Yitzhak (Itchkeh) Freidin, and the children: Aharon, Miriam, Yehoshua and Moshe.

WE FEEL A PAIN IN OUR HEARTS FOR THOSE THAT NEVER MADE IT !!!

The Kibbutzniks

by Yerachmiel Moorstein

We are approaching the Jubilee Year of the time when members of our town were among those who laid a foundation for the growing *kibbutzim*, and on them is the pride of the entire nation.

These people accomplished the great miracle: the transformation of rocky mountains, full of thorns and pricklers for over two thousand years, into flowering and open settlements.

There is no financial substitute that can do all of this. Only the pioneering spirit, the strength of will, and the ideal concept of redemption of the land of the people, made it possible to withstand all the difficult tribulations involved. The pioneers literally took hold of the land with their very fingernails, they removed the stones, they plowed, sowed, planted, and the result: settlements that derive their sustenance from manual labor for over three generations, to the everlasting glory of the people of Israel and to the wonderment of the other nations of the earth.

They were not angels, but ordinary human beings, but their way of life was based on the notion of equality of means, and the creation of a just community which would serve as an example to those that would come after us.

In Zelva, they lived and grew up just like their brethren, until the time that the Nazi Destroyer and his accomplices descended upon them, uprooting them, and annihilating the residents of the town in the extermination camps that are known and held up to obloquy.

Most of the families in Zelva were blessed with children, but lacking in the means needed to finance the trip. Making *aliyah* to Israel was a difficult undertaking, and in addition, the British, who at that time ruled the land, did not give permission to immigrate. The few who managed to reach the Holy Land were fortunate indeed.

They came to a desert, a land not worked, and with their hands they created something out of nothing. At the beginning, they lived on a little bread and measured amounts of water, but in the end they realized their dream: the establishment of fertile settlements.

We are proud of their work, and in the name of our townspeople, I convey the list of pioneers and warriors who have left us a legacy of symbol and example.

Let us remember these who follow, that came out from among us:

Shmuel Bar-Am and *Anshel Bar-Tov* (may they rest in peace) - among the founders of *Kibbutz Ramat-Hashofet*.

David Lantzevitzky (may he rest in peace) - among the founders of *Kibbutz Noan*.

Aharon Merrill (may he rest in peace) - among the founders of *Kibbutz Giveat HaSheloshah*.

Let us convey our sympathy to their families.

And blessings and good things to those who carry on after them:

Rivkah Wasserman (Ravitz)	-	Kibbutz Efek
Mordechai Pomerantz	-	Giveat HaSheloshah
Shmuel Pomerantz-Hadari	-	Giveat Chaim
Ze'ev Pomerantz-Hadari	-	Be'er Sheva
The Rogosin Family, Grandson		
Abraham Shapiro from Canada	-	Giveat Chaim
Chaim Slutsky	-	Ramat Hashofet

Those Who Died In The Kibbutzim

At Ramat HaShofet	-	Anshel and Shmuel
At Noan	-	David
At Giveat HaSheloshah	-	Aharon Merrill

THEY BUILT FOR THE FUTURE OF THE NATION!

The Hills of Ephraim,
Received a fighting pioneer,
Who with the sweat of his brow,
Tore up deep-sunk roots.

Dedicated to the task,
To master the wilderness,
To revitalize the land,
For the sake of the nation.

The prickles and thorns,
From the valley and hills,
The pioneer uprooted,
And in their place - a marvelous settlement.

He smoothed the roads,
He worked with blood and sweat.
Planting greenery amidst rock, that would grow
in the future.

To this laboring people, they gave fruit, ;
resting place and shade. The pioneers, Anshe
and Shmuel wrought miracles in Israel.

And also David and Aharon,
On the Land of Zion.
I raise to you a memorial.
We will carry you in our hearts with pride!!!

The Heroism of Eliezer

by Yerachmiel Moorstein

Only after the fourth day of the Yom Kippur war, after he was wounded, and Eliezer lost his memory, did substantial Egyptian forces capture the forward post under his command amid a tank battle. This command post was defended only by Eliezer and five other soldiers, but the Egyptians thought that they were facing a very substantial force.

After being captured, Eliezer received medical attention, and many blood transfusions. The Egyptian doctors performed a series of very difficult operations on him. He went for two weeks without his memory. However, with the passage of time, he began to heal, and he even helped out with other hospitalized wounded.

Among the last of the liberated wounded from Egypt, 17 soldiers, was Eliezer. His family and friends all received him with great honor.

Eliezer's father, a scion of our town, Emanuel Vishnitzky, was a watchman in the days of the bloody guerilla fighting with the Arabs during the time of the British Mandate. His mother, Zhenya (may she rest in peace), was a Holocaust survivor. His sisters are - Dvorah and Shafirah.

Well, the apple doesn't fall very far from the tree... also Eliezer's grandfather, Reb Mordechai, a son of Zelva of course, was a good-hearted man, and also proved the strength of his arm, when large rabbles of gentile farmers were pressed into wreaking havoc on the Jews of Zelva, after they had gotten themselves drunk on vodka. He beat them forcefully, left and right, and this immediately caused other brave-hearted Jews to come to his side, and they smote the rioting mobsters "hip and thigh" and routed them in all directions...

The Lady Pioneer and Her Son The Palmach Man

by Yerachmiel Moorstein

Rachel Barkleid (May She Rest in Peace)

Rachel made *aliyah* to Israel in 1926. With her first steps in the Holy Land, she became an active participant in the capture of Ra'anana and its settlements. She married Zevulun Ben-Zvi, and had three sons: Zvi, Yisrael and Shmuel.

In the War of Independence, her oldest son, Zvi participated actively, and he was wounded, and has remained disabled for all his life. While he did not lose his legs, they have been paralyzed.

Zvi undertook a program of physical therapy for the upper body, and continued with this for several years. In this manner, he succeeded in rehabilitating himself. He drives a car, and participates in the Olympics for the handicapped in all parts of the world, and wins medals. He also extends support to young handicapped people who have the same infirmity as he does.

Rachel's parents, Moshe and Sarah, and her brothers and sister, Dov, David and Hannah, emigrated from Zelva to Argentina with the help of Baron Hirsch, along with about ten additional families.

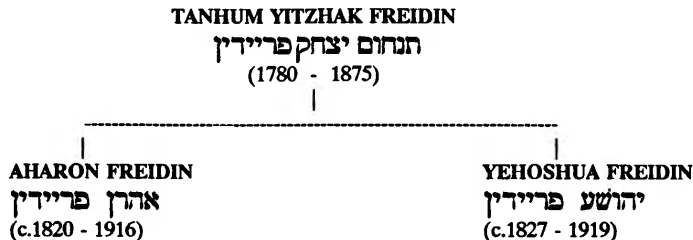
THE FREIDINS OF ZELVA

by Jacob Solomon Berger

The present history of the Freidin family of Zelva extends back to the late 18th century. Much of this history has been constructed from the family's own process of oral transmission from one generation to another. Written evidence of the family's existence is rarer, being restricted to a handful of published scholarly works.

I. Basic Family Genealogy

The earliest verifiable ancestor of the Freidin family is *Tanhum Yitzhak Freidin*. To the best of our knowledge, he had only two sons, *Aharon* and *Yehoshua*. All of these ancestors were long-lived, having survived well into their nineties, as shown in the figure below:



II. Tanhum Yitzhak Freidin

Our earliest verifiable ancestor was also known by his Yiddish nickname, *Tanneh Itcheh*. Close questioning of our older relatives revealed that the name of *Tanneh Itcheh's* father may have been *Jekuthiel*, but we have no source at our disposal by which to verify this. *Tanneh Itcheh* was a butcher and *shochet* (ritual slaughterer) in the town of Zelva. We also were told that he was a *Menaker*. This specialty involved the proper removal of blood vessels from the hindquarters of a slaughtered animal, so that the meat from the hindquarters would be rendered kosher for consumption by observant Jews. It is said of Tanhum Yitzhak Freidin that his knowledge of kashrut ritual was so thorough and respected, that his opinion on the status of the kashrut of a slaughtered animal was always accepted without recourse to higher rabbinical authority.

We date Tanhum Yitzhak's age from the telling of his grandson, Benjamin Freed. In these telling, Benjamin would often refer to the fact that Tanhum Yitzhak lived to be ninety five. More remarkably, Benjamin recalled hearing from his grandfather that he, Tanhum Yitzhak, remembered seeing Napoleon's *Grande Armée* on its march to and from Moscow. The influence of this grand old man is seen by the perpetuation of his name down through the seven generations of the family that is descended from him. Descendants named after Tanhum Yitzhak have been called Isidore, Isidor, Izz and Ian in English; Itzel and Itchkeh in Yiddish, and various names in combination with Yitzhak in Hebrew.

III. The Family of Aharon Freidin

The older son, *Aharon*, carried on his father's occupation as a butcher. Times were hard, and within the memory of our family elders, Aharon Freidin had difficulty making a living. *Zaydeh Ahareh*, as he was known, also had a large garden in which vegetables were grown for sustenance. My great-uncle Isidore Freed recalled plucking vegetables from this garden. My great-uncle Morris Freed recalled that if a calf a day was slaughtered, he was fortunate. Aharon Freidin begat eight children, five sons and three daughters. We do not know the name of his wife, but the pattern of names among his female grandchildren suggests strongly that she may have been named *Hannah*. The eight children of Aharon Freidin were:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. Jonah | 5. Zvi Hirsch (<i>Hirschkeh</i>) |
| 2. Boruch | 6. Liebeh (<i>Liebetcheh</i>) |
| 3. Abraham (<i>Avromchek</i>) | 7. Haya Beileh |
| 4. Etta (<i>Etchinkeh</i>) | 8. Benjamin (<i>Niomkeh</i>) |

Except for *Etchinkeh*, the daughters of the family were known to be married, however, their married names are lost to us. All known surviving generations descended from Aharon Freidin are descended from the three sons, Jonah, Boruch, and Benjamin. My grandmother, Anna Freed, told me, that the families of Abraham (*Avromchek*) and Zvi Hirsch (*Hirschkeh*) were destroyed in the Holocaust, though how she came by this knowledge is uncertain. Aharon's wife died in post-natal confinement after bearing her youngest son. This child was named Benjamin in keeping with the biblical tradition started by the Patriarch Jacob, when his favored wife Rachel died in childbirth (Genesis, 35:16-19). Family lore has it that divine intervention was sought to pass the sentence of death from mother to child with no avail. The migration of Aharon Freidin's descendants truly begins with his grandchildren, although his youngest son, *Benjamin Freed*, came to the United States in mid-life. There are two separate parts to this migration. The first, beginning shortly after the turn of the century, brought the majority of this branch of the family to the United States. The second, which took place in 1932-3, brought the family of Itchkeh Freidin to the Holy Land. Descendants named for Aharon Freidin have been called Arnold, Harold and Aaron.

III. A. The Family of Jonah Freidin

Jonah Freidin followed in his father's occupation, and also was a butcher. He married *Laskeh Helig* from Slonim, and they had six children of which five survived to adulthood. Of these children, all but one, and their families emigrated from Zelva. Laskeh Helig was the sister of Simon Helig who was the founder of the Alliance Colony in Vineland, New Jersey. Simon Helig brought his mother, Hannah Rachel, and his sister Malka, as well as his own wife Hannah Sarah and their two children to the U.S. Many descendants of this family continue to reside in the Vineland area. Jonah Freidin died early in life, as a result of a mishap at the communal bath. His wife, vividly remembered by her grandchildren as *Bubbeh Laskeh* lived to age 88 but is reported to have died of hunger at the onset of the Second World War. The five children of Jonah Freidin were:

III.A.1. Hannah Sarah Bublecki

This oldest daughter married *Reuben Bublecki* by whom she had three children, Jejna, Katriel (*Kattel*), and a daughter, Chaya. Reuben died as a young man, however, the family was relatively well off, and

resisted pleas to leave Zelva in the mid-1930's when evidence of serious trouble for Jews became more pronounced. They fell victim to the passions of anti-Semitic townspeople, who, sensing the tide turning against the Jews, killed them in a pogrom. Evidence from the testimony in the *Zelva Memorial Book* suggests that Chaya was captured, tortured, and then killed by the Nazis subsequent to the German invasion of Russia in June 1941.

III.A.2. Charles Fried (Bezalel)

Tzalkeh or *Tchalyeh*, as he was affectionately called, was the first member of the Freidin family to emigrate from Zelva, and he chose to come the U.S. Charles Fried married *Shushka Novick*. He arrived in New York after having served in the Czar's Army during the Russo-Japanese War. Family lore suggests that he had either fallen asleep at an army watch post, or otherwise not fulfilled his duty properly, and sought to escape punishment. After arriving in the U.S. in 1905 he sent for his wife, and daughter Rose. The family settled on the Lower East Side, where members of his family live to this day. The children of Charles and Shushka Fried are:

1. *Jacob (Jack) Fried*, unmarried, and currently residing in Lower Manhattan. Named in Hebrew for Jonah Freidin.
2. *Ben Fried*, married to *Esther Camhi*, retired luncheonette operator, residing in Brooklyn. Three children, *Donna Calcaterra*, *Alan* and *Wayne*.
3. *Rose*, married to *Nat Danenberg*, both deceased; two children, *Melvin*, and *Arline Ackerman*.
4. *Sarah*, married to *Henry Kasen* (deceased), retired from trucking business, living in Lower Manhattan. Four children: *Martin*, a retired New York City policeman living in Florida; *Zachary* (deceased); *Andrea Grunberger*, living in Wayne, New Jersey; and *Charles*, living in New Hope, Minnesota.

III.A.3. Ida Dinnes (Chaya Laskeh's)

Ida Freidin came to the U.S. very shortly after her brother Charles, as a result of the efforts of her uncle, Simon Helig. She met and married Samuel Joseph (Joe) Dinnes, and they lived their entire lives in Brooklyn, N.Y. They had three children:

1. Abe ("Red") Dinnes
2. John Dinnes
3. Molly Moskowitz

Joe and Ida Dinnes are deceased. Their son, "Red", nicknamed for his distinctive hair color, was a fighter pilot, who was shot down and killed in the Second World War. John Dinnes, now deceased, was a dentist, who had two children, Martin, a renown veterinarian in the entertainment community, and Marjorie Cohen, who both live with their families in California. Molly and Irving Moskowitz live in Brooklyn. Irving is a retired window shade and Venetian blind manufacturer. The Moskowitzes have three children, Donald, Philip and Amy Schoenfeld, three grandchildren and a great-grandchild.

III.A.4. The Family of Fanny Shapiro (Frumkeh)

Fanny came to the U.S. shortly after her brother and sister. She is a surviving twin, her sister, *Shushka*, having died as a young girl from influenza (perhaps during the great epidemic of 1918-9). She met and married Isadore Shapiro, and the couple resided in Brooklyn. They had one son, John Shapiro, who today lives in Shafisbury Vermont where he is engaged in an antique business. John married Bea Silverman, and they have three children, Paul, Tandy Fixell, and Lawrence, and four grandchildren.

III.A.5. Tanhum Yitzhak Freidin (Itchkeh)

When Charles Fried left Zelva, he also gave up the trade of butcher, which he had undertaken when his father Jonah died. Though he briefly considered this trade when he came to New York, Charles Fried ultimately entered the garment trades like so many millions of other immigrants of that era. Back in Zelva, the youngest son, *Itchkeh*, was considering work as a milliner. With his older brother gone, however, it fell to him to take over the family business, and so he became the fourth generation Freidin to be a butcher. Itchkeh Freidin married *Malka Gelman*, daughter of *Avraham* and granddaughter of *Yosheh Gelman the Maggid*, and continued to live in Zelva, where he prospered as a butcher and cattle merchant. Itchkeh and Malka Freidin had six children. One daughter died in early infancy. The surviving five children are:

- | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Chaim Jonah Gilony | 3. Miriam Sabarov |
| 2. Aharon Freidin | 4. Yehoshua Freidin |
| 5. Moshe Freidin | |

This family is the foundation of the Freidin presence in the Holy Land. It was Chaim who first emigrated to the Holy Land in 1933, motivated by the intense Zionism that he had acquired as a member of the *Betar* movement, and his direct contact with the charismatic Vladimir Ze'ev Jabotinsky. Chaim was perceptive enough to sense the impending disaster that was beginning to descend on Eastern European Jewry. Although conditions were far from good in the Holy Land, he portrayed the situation optimistically to his father back in Zelva. Eventually he persuaded his father to emigrate, and in 1935, Itchkeh Freidin brought his entire family to Tel Aviv, thus sparing them the terrible fate that overtook those who stayed behind. Times were quite difficult, and Itchkeh experienced sufficient setbacks in livelihood to tempt him to return to Zelva. However, he eventually opened a butcher store (*Itliz*) and continued this business for his entire life. In time, he turned this business over to his youngest son, Moshe, who is the fifth generation in the Freidin family to operate a butcher business. This business runs today at 174 Dizengoff Street in the city of Tel Aviv, Israel.

III.B. The Family of Boruch Freidin

Boruch Freidin married *Genendel Rubinstein*, daughter of Zalman and Pearl Rubinstein. Three children were born from this marriage:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Anna Freed (<i>Channeh</i>) | 2. Isidore Freed (<i>Itzel</i>) |
| 3. Morris Freed (<i>Moisheh</i>) | |

Boruch Freidin contracted an incurable disease as a young man, and passed away, leaving Genendel widowed with three very young children. To ease her situation, Genendel sent Anna and Isidore, then aged six and four, to live at the home of *Rabbi Yehoshua Freidin* in Ozernitsa, keeping two year old Morris with her. Anna would not stand being separated from her mother, and returned within six months. Isidore would not return to her for fifteen years.

Genendel remarried, to *Simcha Mavshovich*, and moved to Bialystok. By this marriage, she had two daughters:

1. Rachel Freedman
2. Fagel Krugman

Anna Freed would eventually marry her uncle, Benjamin Freed, her father's youngest brother. It was Isidore Freed who was the catalyst for bringing this segment of the family out of Zelva to the U.S. He returned to his mother's home in Bialystok facing the threat of conscription into the Czar's Army. Family lore has it that Genendel was offered an option by a doctor to inflict a deformity on Isidore, thereby disqualifying him from military service. This she refused, preferring to send him to the risks of the New World. At this point, Isidore did not have the money to buy passage on a ship. Family lore further tells us that he had purchased a lottery ticket which he had been carrying around for some time. One day, a man came up to him and identified himself to Isidore as the seller of the lottery ticket. He then told Isidore that he held the winning ticket, and gave him the proceeds. It was these proceeds that Isidore used to buy his passage to the United States.

Isidore Freed came to New York in 1907. In order to prevent the headstrong Anna from joining her brother, Genendel insisted she marry her uncle, Benjamin Freed, and thereby establish a stable family base in Zelva. This took place shortly after Isidore's departure. Under similar compulsions as his brother, Morris Freed arrived in New York in 1910. In the following decade, Isidore Freed met and married *Sarah Kirschner*, and established himself as a dry goods merchant on the Lower East Side, with a store on Allen Street near Canal Street.

Beginning after the First World War, Isidore Freed undertook initiatives to bring the remainder of his family to the U.S. In 1921, he brought Benjamin and Anna Freed to the U.S., along with their sole surviving daughter, Sarah. In 1923, he brought his mother, Genendel, and his two sisters, Ray and Fagel to the U.S. Genendel, a strong-willed woman, would live the rest of her life in comfort and dignity in the home of her son, whom she was forced to send away from home as a child. She would live to see the birth of her first great-grandchild, Jack Berger, before she would pass away at the age of 77.

III.B.1. Isidore Freed

Isidore and Sarah Freed settled in Brooklyn where they had three children:

1. *Leonard Freed*, who became a physician and radiologist, and served as a medical officer in the Second World War. He has two sons by his second marriage, Leonard, Jr. and Frederick. He is currently employed at the U.S. Army hospital in Fort Rucker, Alabama.
2. *Beatrice Melnick*, who was trained as a social worker, and married Dr. Jacob ("George") Melnick. The Melnicks reside in Brooklyn, and have three children: Arthur, Laurence ("Larry"), and Judy Brickman.

3. *Arnold Freed*, who is a microbiologist. He married Pauline Adelman and they have three children: Dr. Jeffrey, Valerie ("Laurie") Brown, and Debra. The Arnold Freeds lived in the Midwest United States for a number of years, returning to Vineland New Jersey, where they discovered the Helig kinsmen of the Jonah Freidin family.

In 1950, Isidore Freed closed his business in New York, and moved to Florida, where his son, Leonard was practicing medicine. During his later years, he operated a small motel, and then retired. His wife, Sarah passed away in 1975, and he passed away in 1977 at age 87.

III.B.2. Morris Freed

Morris Freed married *Goldie ("Gussie") Gindin*. He also entered the garment trades, and worked his entire life as a milliner. Morris and Goldie Freed lived in Brooklyn, and had three children:

1. *Bernard Freed*, married to Pauline Goldwasser. Bernard Freed had his own costume jewelry business. He and his family have always lived in Brooklyn, and he has two daughters, Gloria Jackelow and Evelyn Nebel.
2. *Toby Forman*, married to Sol Forman (deceased) who worked in supermarket management on Long Island prior to retirement in Florida. The Formans have two sons, Steven and Joel.
3. *Jeanette Socks*, married to Lee Socks (deceased), residing in Boca Raton, Florida. Jeanette has three children by her former marriage to Howard Itzkowitz: Gary, Kenneth, and Randi Weidhorn.

Morris Freed passed away in 1977 at age 85. Gussie Freed passed away in 1989 at the age of 90. She was the last survivor of the original immigrant families that came to the New York area.

III.B.3 Ray Freedman

Ray married Jacob Freedman and they had two daughters. Jake, who was a bagel baker, died from pneumonia in 1936. The oldest daughter, Millicent (Mollie) married Al Smith and had one son, Brian. Subsequent to a divorce, she married Sylvan Kippe, and they are retired in Tucson, Arizona. Her sister Sylvia (Selma) married Nathan Goldstein, and has one daughter, Jacqueline Resch, both living in Brooklyn.

III.B.4 Fagel Krugman

Fagel married Benny (*Bereleh*) Krugman, and they had three children. Fagel tragically died very young of cancer in 1932. Benny and the young children suffered some of the worst adversities of the Depression years, but in the fullness of time overcame those troubled times in fine fashion. The oldest son, Sam was born in Europe. He married Sylvia Bernstein and they recently retired after many years of working for the postal service. They have two children, Fran, married to Allan Rosenblatt (their children are Hugh and Joanna), and Mark, married to Marian Schnall (their children are Lindsay Robyn and Jason Seth). David, (the second son) and his wife Anita have one son, Paul Krugman. David is retired after a career as a lawyer in the insurance industry, and Paul is a distinguished economist, teaching at MIT. Mildred married Isaac (Ike) Pitchon, and ran a furniture business for many years in Brooklyn. Their children are Francine and Joel.

III.C. The Family of Zvi Hirsch Freidin (Hirschkeh)

Zvi Hirsch (*Hirschkeh*) Freidin was one of the several family members who was a butcher by trade. Our knowledge of this family is fragmentary, and is reconstructed from the memories of Chaim Gilony, and Ephraim (*Foyka*) Gelman. *Hirschkeh Freidin* was married to *Atara (Kreineh) Bereshkovsky*. They had four children. *Hirschkeh* passed away in 1915, and his wife in 1922. The four children were:

1. Yitzhak Jonah (*Itcheh Yona*) who was also a butcher. He was married, and had two children.
2. Samuel Boruch (*Shmuel Boruch*) who was one of the prominent teachers at the *Tarbut* School in Zelva. He was married to *Hannah Lifshitz* from Zelva, but had no children.
3. Elijah Zebulun (*Elie Zavel*) who was also a butcher. Elie Zavel married his first cousin, *Hannah Freidin*, daughter of *Abraham Freidin*. *Elie Zavel* was a business partner both with *Itchkeh Freidin* and *Yedidkeh Freidin* who were butchers, and all first cousins. He is known to have had two children.
4. *Joseph Freidin*, who was married to *Esther Moorstein*, the sister of *Yerachmiel Moorstein* who edited the *Zelva Memorial Book*. They had two children, one of which was a son, named Yitzhak. Joseph Freidin was a manufacturer of leather shoe tops.

This entire family is known to have perished in the Holocaust. Samuel Boruch Freidin was among the early victims, when the Gestapo entered the town of Zelva and rounded up the intelligentsia who were immediately executed by firing squad in the Bereshko Forest. The remaining family members were eventually taken to the Treblinka concentration camp where they met their untimely end.

III.D. The Family of Abraham Freidin

The details of the family of *Avromchek* Freidin come from the recollections of *Foyka* Gelman. *Avromchek* Freidin was also a butcher. He was married twice, but the names of his wives are not now known to us.

Three children were born to his first wife:

1. *Tanhum Yitzhak*, called *Tanhum* was a butcher, and married a woman from Bialystok. They had one child.
2. *Jedediah (Yedidkeh)* was a butcher as well, and a partner with his cousin, *Elie Zavel Freidin*. He married *Leah Zlotnitsky*, daughter of *Mich'l Mendel* the Cooper, and they had one son and one daughter.
3. *Hannah Freidin*, who married her first cousin *Elie Zavel Freidin*.

There was one son born of Abraham Freidin's second marriage, and this was *Chaim Freidin*, who also became a butcher. He was known to be married, but apparently had no children. Abraham Freidin

is purported to have died before the onset of the Second World War

III.E. The Family of Benjamin Freed

Benjamin Freed was a scholar and a teacher of religious studies. He married his niece, Anna Freed and begat three children in Zelva: *Boruch, Sarah and Mindel*. An epidemic struck Zelva about 1914 [very likely typhus] which took the life of Boruch, and deprived Sarah of her hearing, leaving her deaf for the rest of her life. Mindel, named for Genendel's sister, was to die tragically of appendicitis in her father's arms, on the eve of their departure for the U.S., for lack of medical care. The family arrived in New York in January 1921 with Anna eight months pregnant. One month later, she gave birth to *Harold Freed*. Four years later, she gave birth to her youngest son, *Joshua Freed*.

The family first settled on Orchard Street, but shortly thereafter moved to Brooklyn where they eventually settled in the Borough Park section. Benjamin Freed continued to practice as a Hebrew teacher, and lived to be 90, and Anna live to be 80. The children of Benjamin and Anna Freed are:

III.E.1. Sarah Berger

Sarah Freed, married *Louis Berger*. The marriage was ill-fated, and Sarah returned to live with her parents, where she gave birth to her only son, *Jack Berger*. Jack was raised in his grandparents home, and went on to become an engineer and a banker. He married *Carol Lynn Kleinberg*, and they have six children: *Sharon Ann (married to Dennis Javer), Daniel, David, Judyth, Rachel, and Robert Ian*. The Bergers live in Mahwah, New Jersey. Sarah Berger lives in Monsey, N.Y.

III.E.2. Harold Freed

Harold Freed, married *Pearl Goldstein*, after serving in the Second World War. He became a High School teacher in the City of New York, from which he has since retired. The Harold Freeds reside in Teaneck, New Jersey, and they have three daughters: *Deborah Getman, Susan Hollander and Beth Silverstein*, and eight grandchildren. He obtained his name when a nurse anglicized the name, *Arel* which she heard from Anna during her confinement.

III.E.3. Joshua Freed

Joshua Freed married *Harriet Mandelbaum*, and after living in The Bronx, moved to New Jersey, where they settled in Hillsdale. Joshua Freed is an accountant, and is employed as the Controller for a fabric laminating company. They have three children: *Jonathan, David, and Benjamin*. David and Beth Freed have two children, *Rebekah and Elliot*.

IV. The Family of Yehoshua Freidin

Yehoshua Freidin ranks as the pre-eminent religious scholar of our family. His marriage to *Chaya Sarah* produced five children, all of whom reached maturity and had children of their own. The five children of Yehoshua Freidin are:

- | | |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Eliezer Freidin | 2. Reuven Jonah Rubinowitz |
| 3. Rachel Beileh Pomerantz | 4. Hasia Fagel Futritzky |
| 5. Esther Leah Mednick | |

Descendants of the families of all these children are known to exist, with the exception of the family of Eliezer Freidin. Reuven Jonah was given a different surname as a defense mechanism. The notoriously anti-Semitic Czar, Nicholas I, had issued his infamous ukase, in which he ordered that every third male child in Jewish households was to be forcibly conscripted into the Russian Army. It was a common practice, in those times, to give a second born son a different last name to confound the authorities. Even though no third son was born in this family, the name change remained.

Yehoshua Freidin was an ordained Rabbi of considerable scholarly reputation. He held a modest pulpit, in the tiny hamlet of Ozernitsa, ten miles east of Zelva. He was well-known in scholarly circles as the author of two collections of sermons. His first book was published in 1888 under the title, *EVVEN YEHOSHUA* (The Rock of Joshua). In 1905 and again in 1908, his second collection was published under the title, *BEYT YEHOSHUA* (The House of Joshua). Such was the esteem for this man, that the descendants of his brother Aharon's family proudly bear his name, not to mention the many who are in a direct line of descent from him. They generally bear the name, Irwin, or Irvin, and, of course, Joshua.

IV.A. The Family of Eliezer Freidin

Eliezer Freidin married *Bella Sedletsky*, and five children resulted from this union. Information about this family is fragmented, and all are believed to have perished either through Russian pogroms, Stalin's purges, or the Holocaust. We are told that "*Leizer*" himself was of genius caliber, having been ordained as a Rabbi at the age of 16. In the introduction to *EVVEN YEHOSHUA*, Rabbi Yehoshua gives considerable credit to his firstborn son for the content of that volume. He says that one of the reasons for choosing the book's name was that the Hebrew word for "rock" - *EVVEN* is an acronym for *Eliezer Ben*, making the title read: *Eliezer Ben Yehoshua*, the name of his son. Eliezer Freidin was also a gifted entrepreneur. He moved to a village called Krizi, near Minsk, where he established a factory for the manufacture of boxes which were medicinal containers. Rabbi Isser Yehuda Unterman, who would be Chief Rabbi of Israel was a resident in his home for three years. All of his children were distinguished in their own right as well:

1. *Jacob Freidin*, who was married to Rachel Kapilovich, the Zelter Rabbi's daughter, was a lawyer of some repute. His son was a gifted artist and his daughter a ballerina. All are believed to have perished in the Minsk ghetto.
2. *Max Freidin*, was a distinguished doctor and microbiologist. His works were published in

Byelorussian medical journals. He and his son also perished in the Minsk ghetto.

3. *Jonah Freidin* was an actor in Stanislavsky's Theater. He went on to become a lawyer after suffering a leg injury that curtailed his acting career.
4. *Tanya (Taibel) Freidin* was a noted linguist, and worked as a curator in the Hermitage Museum in Leningrad.
5. *Faygel Freidin* was a dentist who resided in Moscow. She was exiled to Siberia, and her fate is unknown.

Eliezer had his property seized by the Bolsheviks. Although correspondence continued with relatives in the U.S. into the late thirties, even that stopped, apparently under duress from authorities. The last word received was that Eliezer Freidin was imprisoned, and in 1942 at age 81, he died in prison.

IV.B. The Family of Reuven Jonah Rubinowitz

The second son of Yehoshua Freidin took up residence in the town of Vasilishki, in the Lida Province of Byelorussia. He first married *Nahama* about 1895 by whom he had two sons, *Karl* and *Isidor*. Tragically, *Nahama* died, and Reuven Jonah married again, this time to *Kahla Rachel Kopstein*, *Nahama's* niece. There were five children born from this marriage:

- | | |
|-----------------|---------------|
| 1. Leah Rubin | 2. Max Rubin |
| 3. Nathan Rubin | 4. Jack Rubin |
| 5. Milton Rubin | |

Regrettably, tragedy overtook this family, again and again. *Kahla Rachel* died shortly after the birth of Milton, and the oldest daughter, *Leah* assumed her mother's responsibilities in the household. The burden on *Leah* proved too great, and within three years, she too succumbed, and passed away. It was in 1908 that both *Karl* and *Isidor* left for the U.S. to seek their fortune, and find a more hospitable place for the family to live. Because their uncle, *Max Kopstein* was in the mining town of Vandergrift, Pennsylvania, *Karl* and *Isidor* chose to go beyond New York, to Pittsburgh. In 1914, *Karl* took his own life, having been overcome by a deep depression due to family problems and the difficulty of his own immediate circumstances. *Isidor* then came to his uncle *Max* in Vandergrift, and began his business in the garment trade as a back pack peddler.

Isidor Rubin persevered, and after he married, and began a family of his own, he was able to turn again to his objective of bringing his family to live with him. In 1921, through *Isidor's* efforts, the remaining brothers and his father were brought to the U.S. Reuven Jonah first moved into his son's home, and after spending some months with the *Mednick* family in Chicago, he returned to take the pulpit of the Eleventh Avenue Synagogue in Braddock, Pennsylvania. In 1947, after the birth of his first great-grandson, *Jay Rubin*, he left for Israel where he wished to live out his remaining years. He lived in Haifa with the family of his nephew, *Eliezer (Lou) Ritz [Futritzky]*, and passed away in 1959 at the age of 96. His sons established themselves in and around the Pittsburgh area. They and their families represent the bulk of the surviving descendants of Rabbi Yehoshua Freidin:

IV.B.1. Isidor Rubin

Isidor Rubin was the catalyst and focal point for bringing the entire Rubin family to the United States. After working as a back pack peddler, he met and married *Lena Wasserman* by whom he had three sons:

1. *Samuel Karl Rubin*, was a publisher of a movie film magazine. Sam married *Natalia Buchman* (deceased) and had two children: *Jo Anne Chodock*, and *Jay Yale Rubin*. Sam has remarried, and he and his wife, *Lois* resided in Davenport, Iowa prior to retiring to Scottsdale, Arizona, where *Lois* recently passed away.
2. *Irvin ("Daidy") Rubin* (deceased). Trained as a mathematician, and managed a number of the the family businesses. He was the author of a family history of *Yehoshua Freidin's* descendants. Married *Marcia Friedman*, father of *Marc Rubin* and *Maida Kay Rubin*
3. *Norman Rubin*, a business administration graduate of the University of Pittsburgh, who manages a number of the family business interests. Married to *Rose Sara Altman*, father of *Steven* and *Nancy Rubin*.

Isidor Rubin always wanted his family around him, and this accounted for an entire way of life for him. After he brought his father and brothers to the U.S., he acquired a half interest in his uncle Max's store. This became the basis for a family business in retail men and women's clothing, with stores in several towns of the Kiski Valley in Western Pennsylvania. It was in the late 1940s that the family officially shortened its name to Rubin. In 1950, "Izz" Rubin was honored as "Citizen of the Year" in Vandergrift. He passed away in 1965 at age 72.

IV.B.2. Nathan Rubin

Nathan Rubin, married *Yetta Rubin* (no relation), and had three children, *Corrine Harris*, *Leah Rae Lambert*, and *Allen Rubin*. He was incapacitated in mid-life after working in the family businesses. Leah Rae is Justice Policy Coordinator in the Province of Ontario, and Allen is a professor at the University of Texas.

IV.B.3. Max Rubin

Max Rubin, married *Glaphy Egly*, no children, worked his entire life in the family businesses. During retirement in later life he lived with his brother Milton and he passed away in 1990. There was no issue from this union.

IV.B.4. Jack Rubin

Jack Rubin, married *Frances Silverman* and has two sons, *Kenneth* and *Lawrence*. He recently retired after 53 years of working in the family businesses. Like his brother Isidor, whom he succeeded in carrying on family traditions, Jack is a pillar of his community, and continues residing in Pittsburgh during retirement. Both sons continue the family tradition of working in retailing.

IV.B.5. Milton Rubin

Milton Rubin, married *Esther Jane Rosenthal* (deceased) by whom he had two sons, *Jeffrey and Edward Karl ("Buddy") Rubin*. Currently active in managing the family businesses. "*Buddy*" Rubin died tragically in an auto accident at age 5. *Jeffrey Rubin* is a graduate of Carnegie-Mellon University and is a practicing Electrical Engineer. He is married to the former *Nancy Stone*, and they have a daughter, *Melissa Carol Rubin*.

The descendants of Reuven Jonah Rubinowitz have spread over the Northeastern U.S., though most can be found in the Pittsburgh area. Many continue to be engaged in the retail clothing business, though they are well represented in many other lines of endeavor.

IV.C. The Family of Rachel Beileh Pomerantz

The third child, and oldest daughter of Yehoshua Freidin, married *Barnett Pomerantz* in the town of Breza, Russia about 1888. They had two daughters, *Lottie* and *Lena*, both born in Russia. The family emigrated to the United States, settling in Chicago. "*Beryl*" Pomerantz passed away in 1928 in Chicago. Rachel Beileh survived him and lived to the ripe old age of 91. She passed away in Chicago in 1956.

IV.C.1. Lena Erenstein

1. *Lena* married *Sam Erenstein* and their was no issue from this union. Both are deceased.

IV.C.2. Lottie Spector

Lottie married *Max Spector*, and there were three children from this marriage. Max Spector passed away in 1955, and Lottie in 1979. Their three children are:

1. *Bernice Rosen*, married Daniel Rosen (deceased), and is the mother of *Janet Ostro* and *Judy Podolsky*.
2. *Irwin Spector*, married to *Barbara White*, and had two children, *Marla* and *Mark Spector*.
3. *Richard Spector*, married to *Sondra Smith* and had three children, *Debra Spector*, *Mark Spector*, and *Susan Miller*.

V.D. The Family of Hasia Fagel Futritzky

Hasia Fagel married *David Futritzky*, the son of *Rabbi Jacob Futritzky*, who was the *Dayan* of Zelva. There were five children born in this family:

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|-----------------------|-------------|
| 1. Moshe Beryl Ritz | 2. Max Ritz |
| 3. Rivkah Frum | 4. Izz Ritz |
| 5. Eliezer "Lou" Ritz | |

The family resided in Zelva for over a quarter of a century. The turning point in this family's history came during the deadly influenza epidemic of 1918. Within one month, the dread disease claimed the lives of Rabbi Jacob, David and Moshe Beryl Futritzky. The burden for family sustenance fell on the older brothers, Max and Izz, and Rivkah, barely thirteen. Moshe Beryl's wife *Rebecca* came from the *Bernick* family, which had already immigrated to Canada. Through the efforts of the *Bernick* family, a chain of immigration was set in motion that would bring this entire family to Canada. In time, Max Ritz would marry Rebecca's sister, *Faye Bernick*, further deepening the two family ties.

Moshe Beryl's widow Rebecca, and her infant twins were the first to go in the early 1920s, followed shortly by the older brothers, Max and Izz. In these years, it was Rivkah Ritz who became the mainstay of the family, enabling her younger brother, Lou, to complete his education at the *Zelver Tarbut Schule*. Lou, an ardent Zionist, emigrated to the Holy Land. In 1930, Rivkah met and married *Saul Frum*, and they took Hasia Fagel and also immigrated to Canada. The family officially shortened its name to Ritz, and settled in Toronto. Hasia Fagel lived the rest of her life with her daughter Rivkah. She is remembered for her warmth and selflessness as the "Great Bubbeh," *die Moomeh*, and *Tante Chashkeh*. In Israel, her grandchildren recall that in her mid-eighties, she wrote to her brother, *Ruveh Yoineh*, telling him that she was finally going to get glasses because she was having difficulty reading his letters. Hasia Fagel lived to be 91 years of age. Her descendants live both in Canada and Israel. Descendants of David Futritzky's brother, Moshe, live in Israel, where they have adopted the Hebrew name, *Uryon*.

IV.D.1. Moshe Beryl Ritz

Moshe Beryl and *Rebecca Ritz* had the fraternal twins, *Irwin* and *Eva*. On her arrival to Canada, Rebecca Ritz devoted herself entirely to raising her children. They literally started with nothing, because all their possessions were stolen on arrival. Rebecca went to work as a seamstress and raised her children with courage and dignity. Though personal health problems would plague this family, Rebecca would live to see her children achieve high levels of professional achievement.

1. *Irwin Ritz* would graduate as a pharmacist, and despite having to take radiation therapy to combat Hodgkin's Disease, returned to medical school and became one of the leading urologists in Canada. He married *Susan Marie Trinnes*, who died six years later of Multiple Sclerosis. There were no children. Throughout a distinguished medical career, Dr. Irwin Ritz fought for his life against ever deteriorating health. He succumbed to his many illnesses in December 1981, and passed away.
2. *Eva Ritz* married *Stanley Solomon* who is today the first violist of the Toronto Symphony. Their two children, *Maribeth Erbe* and *Leonard Solomon*, would also manifest artistic talent and find careers in music. Eva Solomon succumbed to cancer at age 46.

IV.D.2. Max Ritz

Max Ritz was a furrier by trade. His marriage to *Faye Bernick* produced their only son *David*, who became a dentist. *David Ritz* married *Lil Schiff* and they have one son, *Michael*.

IV.D.3. Rivkah Frum

Rivkah Ritz was a mainstay of her family. Denied the opportunity for formal education herself, she enabled her younger brother, Lou to obtain schooling. In 1930 she married *Saul Frum* from Lomza, and shortly thereafter, took her mother, and emigrated to Canada. They had one son, *Murray Frum*. Saul and Rivkah Frum established a fancy food store in Toronto which enjoyed a very high reputation in the community. Rivkah Frum passed away in 1973. Saul ("Sholom") Frum resides in Toronto. Murray Frum went on to become a dentist, and a highly successful real estate entrepreneur. He married *Barbara Rossberg* [deceased], and they had three children: *Matthew* (adopted), *David* and *Linda*. David, and his wife Danielle, just had a baby girl named Miranda.

IV.D.4. Izz Ritz

Izz Ritz was a top professional upholsterer and married *Lil Heit*, by whom he had one daughter, *Honey Ritz*. Izz developed palsy in mid-life, which eventually ended his ability to work. This unfortunately led to a disintegration of his family, and the whereabouts of his daughter are unknown.

IV.D.5. Eliezer Ritz

Eliezer ("Lou") Ritz was the first member of the Freidin family to come to the Holy Land, in 1926. In 1930 he came to Canada to study accountancy at LaSalle University, and lived with his family in Toronto. He returned to the Holy Land in 1934, and in 1936 married *Manya Kaganovich*. Lou Ritz rose to a senior position with the Israel Power Company in Haifa. He succumbed to cancer and died in 1970. He and Manya had two children:

1. *Maxima*, married to *Eli-Emil Neutra*, living in Haifa. They have three children, *Ronen*, *Osnat* and *Ilanit*.
2. *Oded Ritz* married to *Jocheved Olevsky*, and is a software engineer, living in Ra'anana with their three children, *Ayelet*, *Ronit* and *Uri-Eliezer*.

IV.E. The Family of Esther Leah Mednick

Esther Leah married *Rabbi Chaim Mednick*, who was ordained at the Slobodka Yeshivah, and took the pulpit in the Russian town of Shiverin. Their only daughter, *Thelma (Hannah Taibel)* was born there. The town was the scene of frequent anti-Semitic outbursts, and in one frenzy, Esther Leah, along with some twenty other Jews, were trapped in the main square, herded off, and buried alive by the rampaging peasants. After 24 hours, the grave was opened, and Esther Leah was one of the few who emerged alive, though her health was broken, and she would never be the same.

Rabbi Chaim Mednick was impelled by this incident to go to Moscow to seek the assistance of *Fagel Freidin*, daughter of *Leizer*, who was able to obtain forged exit papers for this family. Rabbi Mednick did not even return home. He cabled his wife and instructed her to pack immediately and with Thelma, to meet him at the Latvian border. They succeeded in leaving Russia and reached Riga where they stayed for several months.

Rabbi Mednick's sister in Chicago then arranged to bring them to the U.S. With assistance from HIAS, the Mednick family came first to Quebec, and in 1930, to Chicago. Esther Leah passed away in 1946, and Rabbi Chaim Mednick in 1955, on the eve of a planned trip to Israel. He was buried in Israel in accordance with his wishes. Thelma, who was unmarried, moved to Tel Aviv where she was employed by Delek, the Israeli oil company. Thelma continued to live and work in Israel, and passed away in 1985.