

## Hyman Kruglack: As We Knew Him

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By Paul Katzeff

Excerpts from the book were selected that talk about events, people and life in the shtetl. There are many, many more stories in this book about Hyman, his life, his family, his many accomplishments, and his friends.

Thank you to Paul Katzeff for allowing us to share in his family's memories.

## Boyerka Lives On

By Hyman Kruglack

(p. 234 – 235)

“Boyerka – a small town, surrounded by tall mountains so that the road coming in runs downhill and the road leaving climbs upward.

The population – 140 families is composed for the most part, of working people. The rest draw their living from trade. It is not a town rich in material goods. Indeed, some inhabitants are very poor.

It is the self-appointed responsibility of Gershon the *Shochet* and certain good wives of the town to relieve the worst of the poverty, at least on the Sabbath. Every Friday, they go from door to door, collecting fresh chalohs and soliciting money to distribute among the poor. They do this to insure that their poorer neighbors will partake of the Sabbath feast like other Jews.

There is joy in the life of the town. It is like one large family. Then one celebrates a joyous occasion, all celebrate with him. When another has troubles, all help to bear them.

World War I breaks out on August 1, 1914, and all the men up to the age of 35 are called up. Boyerka's share in the war effort is greater than her size would warrant. She loses many men on the field of battle.

At home, fear lives with every family. Through three years of war, Boyerka suffers. Hunger, and the continual fear of pogroms are ever present.

Suddenly, a ray of light appears. October, 1917 – the Revolution – brings hope to the Jews of Boyerka. All the people of the Ukraine begin to pray that the day of brotherhood, love and peace will finally come for all.

In a few months, the Bolsheviks are in power, and now the Civil War begins. The Jews of Boyerka – like all Jews in small towns – are victims of every bandit group that passes through the area. Every morning the sun shines on the horror of the previous night – Jews murdered for the crime of being Jews.

Never will Boyerka forget the day when a band came to the town, gathered all the Jews together and drove them to a village where there was a lake called Semenovka. With coarse jests and laughter, the bandits drove everyone into the lake, shooting and shouting, Where is your God?”

On that day a great many Jews are killed. Those who are left live in terror. Each day they prepare for death. Each night they sleep in a different house. For weeks they daily wait for death. Finally the day came that ended the existence of Boyerka.

The bandits came like wild demons – without any semblance of humanity. They asked no questions. Every Jew that was found was slaughtered. The streets ran with Jewish blood. Fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, all met the same death. Only the dead remained in the town when the torch was set to her dwellings.

Two heroes must be remembered. Mendel Reuben Hertz and Leib the Rabbi's son rushed into the houses of worship to rescue the Torahs.

When this day of horrors finally ended, the few survivors came together to bury their dead. Each had to dig graves for his own beloved.

Thus died the small town of Boyerka, which had endured for 300 years.

The pitiful handful of survivors decide to leave the land. They begin a long wandering from one place to another. Little by little, most of them arrive in America – a land which welcomes us with open arms.

For the first time, we taste the freedom we had never known.

In a short time, we of Boyerka decide to replant our town in our new homeland under the name of the Boyerker Benevolent Society. The aim would be to help all who are in need both in America and abroad.

After several years, this new “town” of Boyerka in America takes its place in the forefront of Jewish organizational life.”

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## Remembering Boyerka

by Jean Weisser

Pages 3-7

“The history of a small town called Boyerka is lost with the memories of the generations of Jews who lived and died there. . . . . We know that it [Boyerka] was the trading center for an area dominated by the estates of Graf Pototsky. We know there were possibly 200 Jewish families who lived in this town and who traded with other townspeople and peasants of the outlying areas. There were even smaller hamlets nearby where one or two Jewish families lived and earned their living as overseers of the Prince's sugar beet plantations or forests. Their positions as the agents of Mobility gave them privilege and some economic advantage.

There were also larger towns – almost cities – not too far away, such as Stavishch, Boslov (Bogoslav in Russian) and Tarashta, where there were larger concentrations of Jews and institutions of Jewish life. . . . “

Boyerka lived, for the most part, in rural quiet. The shopkeepers traded with the townspeople all week and with the peasants who came into town for the market day. At one end of the town there was a flour mill which ground wheat and corn for the peasants. Along the main street were the Orthodox church, police station, the school and Synagogue. There were also homes and shops, including a pharmacy. The town also boasted a *Cheder*, *mikveh*, and even a *stibel*, supported by the more Hasidic Jews. Jewish affairs were tended to by the Rabbi and

various benevolent groups. Gershon the *Shochet*, aided by some of the townswomen, made sure that even the poorest had a Sabbath meal by collecting food from all who could give.

It must not be thought, however, that this little town was an earthly paradise. In addition to the repression exercised by the officers of the government, as well as the hostility of the Ukrainian population, there were undoubtedly personal and family antipathies which left ill feeling. When people look back over so many years and remember the horrors which they had and other European Jews underwent since 1905, they easily forget the personal quarrels and feuds which probably enlivened small-town living. Sometimes, they remember some of the gossip. But mostly, they remember their fears and their need for each other in order to survive.

The childhood years must have been much the same for most of the youngsters growing up in the little town of Boyerka in the Russian Ukraine. Many of the memories were sweet. The woods surrounding the town were fragrant, the river ran freely, and the lake was a playground winter and summer.

When Hymie Kruglack reminisced with his life-long friends – Mary and Joseph Savetsky, and Nathan Savetsky – they easily recalled many of the lovely times of their childhood: climbing trees, riding horses, sliding down the frozen hill without sleds. They recalled, also, the great holidays of the year, the preparation for Passover and the High Holidays, and for other holidays like Purim. Many years later, they still remembered the rhymes for the Chanukah dreidl.”

The Kruglacks owned their own house and grocery store. This meant that they were able to afford higher education for their son Hymie. His first schooling was at the local *cheder*. This he completed before he was a bar mitzvah. Hymie’s desire for further education brought him to live in the town of his future wife Celia: the town was Tarashta.

Celia Feldberg and Hymie Kruglack were first cousins. They had known each other from earliest childhood. Celia can remember Hymie’s kind and gentle behavior toward her even when he was a young child. Many years later, when she asked him why he had been so gentle with her even when she had been teasing him, he told her that he had always believed that girls and women should be protected and cared for. This attitude remained with Hymie for his entire life. It showed clearly in the way he cared for his mother, sisters and all the women in his extended family and, above all, his beloved wife.

Bentzie [Benjamin] Kruglack, Hymie’s father, wanted his oldest son to become a rabbi. He certainly had the intellectual capacity for this profession. Therefore, in Tarashta, Hymie went to live in the home of a *lantzman* who was qualified to prepare him for the *yeshiva*.

Celia saw Hymie often at this time. She recalls that he was dissatisfied with formal religious education. After a short time, Hymie decided that he really wanted a secular education. Around the age of fifteen, he left Tarashta, moved to Boslov, and entered the commercial high school, from which he earned a diploma.....

After graduation from the gymnasium, Hymie went back to Boyerka and helped his parents in their store. He brought a breath of fresh air with him from the city to the little town. Many of his friends were ready to accept the new ideas he brought with him. With like-minded young people like Froyka Greendfield and his sisters, Joseph Savetsky and his brothers, Mary Krupnick and her brother, he read the works of Sholem Aleichim, formed a dramatic circle and they all began to develop their intellectual and spiritual lives.

Even in this small town, there were differences of opinion and outlook. Some were deeply religious. Others were concerned only with the grinding, daily necessity of making a living. Hymie Kruglack and his friends responded to the new thinking which was overtaking so

much of the Jewish world in Russia. They read newspapers and journals from the outside world. They responded to the call of Zionism as well as to the socialist idealism which held out hope for a better world for Jews and all oppressed peoples.

Hymie always remembered these years as the good times. He never tired of telling stories and jokes about those days. Some stories may have been apocryphal: "They say that Sholem Aleichem was a tutor in your grandfather's family"; or, "Did you know that there were often fist-fights in town between the Hassidim and the followers of the Rabbi?" or "Do you know why your grandfather stopped being a *shochet*? Because he got tired of the nagging women and the bossy butchers." All told with a smile and a twinkling eye which said, "We had good times along with the bad ones."

Russia's entry into the War in 1914 brought an abrupt end to their young days. Some of the young men, Joseph Savetsky, Yona Sokol, Lyova Rovinsky, among others, were drafted into the Car's army and sent to fight the Germans in Northern Poland.

The Germans entered the Ukraine during the first year of the war. They are remembered as a considerate occupying force who brought trade to the little town and paid for what they bought. They also brought the first automobile that the town had ever seen.

By 1917, the Russian government and its armies were beginning to break down. The incompetence and corruption of the Czarist regime were reflected in the lawlessness which prevailed in the countryside. The Jews in the small towns of the Ukraine knew from immemorable experience that they would be the victims of rape, looting and murder.

A number of the young men who had served in the Czar's army had kept their weapons when they had returned from the battlefields. Other young men, like Max Savetsky, who had been a cattle trader at local fairs, brought guns in from illegal sources. A defense group was formed in anticipation of the inevitable pogroms. When Mary Krupnick and Joseph Savetsky were married in March of 1919, their *chupa*, held under the open sky, was surrounded by their friends carrying rifles. As soon as the ceremony was over, the wedding party ran away. The warning had come that the *pogromniks* were approaching.

The pogroms of 1919-1920 ended the *shtetl* life that had nurtured Jewish souls for many generations. The survivors scattered, most to try their fortune in America. Those who remained in Russia escaped to larger towns and cities where they hoped for safety. Of those who settled in Kiev, many were evacuated by the Soviet government ahead of the advancing Nazis in 1941. Some, however, chose to remain in Kiev and, like Rachel Krupnick, are buried in the infamous *Babi Yar*, - amongst countless Jews who had survived Russian anti-Semitism to become the victim of Nazi anti-Semitism.

Hyman Kruglack escaped both Russian and German oppression and this book tells the story of what he did with the gift of life as a survivor.

*New York City, 1983*

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# Hymie's Memories

By Hyman Kruglack

Pages 49-55 [Parts of text edited out for the sake of brevity.]

*Hymie:*

The farthest back I can remember is my grandfather and grandmother. My grandfather was like every other man, he was the boss of the family. He had his own house, his own business, and naturally, he was the oldest son himself. His business was – he was the one who gave money to the peasants that they had a little bit for small land, fields, but they didn't have no money to work the fields. So he used to give them money in advance and then they sold to him and he made a little profit. His name was, they called him Payse the Red, because he had this beard, a long beard, a red beard.

My grandfather was a very proud man and a very learned man, and the reason I started telling you about him is because I remember him very well. He brought me up in the ways I have now. He brought me up in this and I adopted a lot of his thinking, a lot of his way of life that he had.

After his business day, he would be sitting in his big house with land, maybe half an acre of land, and he liked every afternoon to have a samovar, a kettle of water. And even in the hottest summer days he used to sit under the tree with the kettle, and he studied the Talmud every day for an hour, two hours. In the hottest part of the summer he used to drink from five to eight glasses of tea. And the grandchildren used to stay and watch him. I stayed with my grandfather until I was 15 years old. And he talked so much about the Talmud and everything that he instilled in me, religious fear in order I should be a religious fellow.

I remember going to sleep there, I was about 14 years, I slept with him in one room. Not only one room but one bed. And I thought at that time, if I'm not saying a prayer, in the morning I would not be alive. That's how he influenced me. But when I became already 15 years old he was more modern than some other ones, some other religious people, and he knew that I wanted to go away from this study to be a rabbi. I wanted to go to a modern school, but for him he didn't like it. He wanted me to study only Jewish history and religion.

He was afraid that I would go in the wrong way. But he saw that I made up my mind. He always used to tell me, "Don't stop learning. You want to go somewhere to school I do not like it, but if you want to go, go ahead. But don't stop learning." He expected me to be a rabbi, but I remember what made me not to be religious.

I used to *daven* every day and go to synagogue with him every day. But one day it changed. My father had a store in the bazaar. It used to be on Thursdays that my father had a small store at the fair. And we used to do business on the Thursday more than any other day. And the entire family used to come and help out. And so I used to come to the store and help father. I forgot to say the prayer one morning and about three o'clock in the afternoon I remembered, "Oy! I didn't pray – and I'm here! I didn't die." I had in my mind that I would absolutely die. This is my feeling. And I see that I'm alive. From that minute on I did not go to *Daven* anymore, I didn't pray any more. And I started to think to myself, "It seems to me that all these years are a farce, so to speak. God didn't punish me. I don't do it, the prayer, and I am still alive." So I stopped at this year. But this is a story of the influence my grandfather had on me.

He was 72 years old when he died. No, 74. This was when I was 15 years old when I stopped *davening*, and he was then 65.

So how did he die? I'll tell you. We lived together, my family, my father lived with him in the house, in my grandfather's house. But one year my father decided to move the family, he wanted to move out of his father's house and rent an apartment. He rented an apartment and I took sick, in that apartment. And my grandfather walked to me, to my house, to see how I feel. I had a fever and I was staying in the window seeing how my grandfather was walking to see my house. And I see that he fell and immediately people came around him and he had a heart attack and he died. A stroke, I mean. But he died and I watched it all, right on the street.

My grandmother's name was Nacholmus. She was a very, very good-natured woman. She was lovable, and she was poor. Although my grandfather was not poor, he used to give her a very small sum of money to live on. So she was always without money in her pocket and she always wanted to help out her children. I had an uncle, my father's brother, who was hated. But my grandmother wanted to help him out. Next door to us lived a big landowner, he had his own big house. Any time we had some kind of occasion, the people used to come to him and work, and for that he used to give us a few dollars, a ruble, a half a ruble. So I remember one time he gave me a ruble. And my grandmother saw that I got a ruble for a tip, and she walked over to me and said, "You know, Hymie, my son – your uncle – is in very bad shape. They are so poor they actually haven't got what to eat. Give this to them." You know kids, how they feel about money, but...then my grandmother comes over to get the ruble.

I didn't say a word, I took the ruble and I gave it to my grandmother and she was so happy and she gave him the ruble and she came back and I still feel the kiss that she gave me that time. She was a smart woman. She said, "You didn't act like a kid, you act like a grown-up person. You gave it without saying no." This is my grandmother.....

..... Now here's another story, this one about my grandfather's brother. My grandfather, who I used to live with, used to tell me that he had a brother who didn't want to be in the army. So he ran away from the town where he lived. He and my grandfather were born not in Boyerka, but in another town, Rashkov. It's about 120 miles from Boyerka. My grandfather married my grandmother, who was born in Boyerka. So my grandfather's brother, he didn't want to go in the army. So what happened in this. He ran away, we didn't know where did he go. And they find it out that he was on the way to America. And my grandfather never knew if his brother is in America or not. The only thing that he knew was that he married, and my grandfather never met him again. My grandfather Payse never met his brother again.

..... My uncle, my father's brother, whose name was Don, he had a son, a very interesting man, he was an American. His son's name was Selman, or Solomon. This Solomon was older than me. When he came to America he was about 35 years old. He studied Yiddish, was a good looking man and was loved by women. He went into the army in the First World War and was taken prisoner by the Germans. And then we didn't hear from him for about three or four years. After that we get a letter from him from a town in Germany, and he has a sweetheart already by the name of Haske. But when they finally let him out of prison, he came back to Boyerka. He had become a very nice fellow and every girl in the town was after him. And finally, he went to another town, where he met a girl and he fell in love. He came back by himself and said to his father and grandfather, who was my grandfather too, that he's going to marry this girl, that they had made a *shitich*. An engagement.

So he asked his family to go to the girl's town with him together to make the engagement contract. I was one of the ones who went there for the family. And it was a very nice affair there

and he made the engagement, everything was all right, they wrote the contract at that time. The contract says he's going to have the wedding in a certain period of time and he came back and in three months he went to the girl for a visit. And he stayed there three, four days and he came back and he called me in. I should tell my grandfather – and his grandfather- that he must send back the contract because he doesn't want to marry. He's disappointed in the girl.

So the entire family was upset. How can this be? He's nice and the girl is nice, so what can be wrong? So my grandfather Payse said to my cousin, "You cannot send back the contract. That would make enemies. Instead, I'll invite her family, her parents, to my town, to my house. And when they come, I will make it so that they should break off the engagement, and I want to remain with her parents the best of friends, too. And I'll arrange that they should remain always friends."

So my grandfather sends a horse and wagon and they brought the family, and he made a party. And at the party, he announces that his grandson decided not to marry your daughter, and somehow they became friends until the day they died. And Selmon married after that , a long time he was married.

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## Recollections Of My Dear Brother

By Elaine Katzeff

Pages 91 – 92

Hymie was 15 or 16 when I was born in Tarashta, in Russia. I think he was in another part of Russia, going to high school when I was born. We lived in Tarashta and Boyerka until I was four, and then we immigrated to Rumania. Although I don't remember it, we sneaked across the border to get into Rumania.

The thing I do know and remember is that, before we left for America, I was taken away from home and went to live with Russian people because there were pogroms going on. I stayed with these people because there were pogroms going on. I stayed with these Russian people, two sisters and a brother, and I was taken for a gentile.

Hymie immigrated to Rumania first. He was hiding from the Bolsheviks. I think he was also the first one to go to America. When I was about six or seven, he came back to Rumania to get us. When he returned to Rumania, the only way he found the family was by describing me, and it seems like everybody knew me. I guess it was because I had red hair. He knew we were in an immigrant camp, a kind of detention camp. We were waiting to get out and my brother was the one who was making sure that we were getting out, not only us but his friends. He made sure that several of them got to the United States.

.....A lot of my early childhood I'm not able to remember. I think the reason I don't is that I had to leave the people I was living with in Russia, had to go to Rumania, and then I had agonizing years because my father and brother Louie had been caught crossing the border and were in a detention camp in Russia. My mother and Hymie were the ones working to get them out and across into Rumania. So Hymie always lived a very intense life with lots of responsibility. ....

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# The Kruglack and Feldberg Families

By Paul Katzeff

Pages 207- 208

.....A half-day's ride by horse and buggy to the east {of Tarashta}, in a *shtetl* called Boyerka, a boy was born to the Kruglack family. He had red hair and was referred to in the lore of our family as Pacie "The Red." (I was named after him 91 years later.)

Pacie Kruglack became a farm manager and a merchant. He loaned peasants money to buy seeds to plant their crops, and he bought their crops after harvest. In 1867, when he was twenty years old, he married Nechema and they had five children: Don, Bentzi, Bluma, Chai Laikee, and Rissa. The family was not wealthy, but they were not poor either.

By 1890, Don Kruglack, Bentzi's younger brother, was twenty-two. He was the Cantor of Boyerka. Bentzi, who was twenty-four, owned his own house where he had a grocery store. Not much is known of the lives of Pacie's other three children except that Bluma's descendant's now live in Odessa, Russia, about two hundred and fifty miles south of where Boyerka once stood and where Pacie the Red was born.

Don Kruglack remained in Russia and lived until 1930. Three of his five children, Rachel, Leika and Chaika (Ida), came to the United States and produced the Kruglack clan that can now be found mostly in Maryland, Boston and Miami.

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## A Moment In A Past Time

By Paul Katzeff

Pages 215 - 217

One steamy summer day in the village of Boyerka, a young man rose very early in the morning and dressed quickly. The year was 1898.

From his bedroom window upstairs he could see the wheat fields of the Ukraine moving like waves in the morning breeze. The land was flat and fertile.

Bentzi Kruglack shook off the morning sleepiness, walked over to the pitcher of cold water that stood porcelain white and silent next to a large, round wash basin on the night table in the corner of the room. He washed his hands and face and paused for a moment before the mirror just long enough to comb his red beard.

He opened a cupboard and brought out his *tephillin* and davened. Finished, he carefully unwrapped the *tephillin* from his arm and forehead and placed them in the cloth his father Pacie "The Red" had given him, almost 20 years earlier. Then, he put everything back in the cupboard and walked downstairs to a small kitchen located behind his grocery store. The store occupied most of the downstairs of the house and opened onto the red dirt main street of Boyerka.

He heated a bowl of porridge and a glass of tea on the wood stove and sat down alone at the table. He was 23 years old.



At six a.m., with the sun already beginning to warm the crisp morning air, he walked out back, hitched his only horse to his only cart, and headed off down the road. It was no more than two deep ruts in a red clay bed, out between the endless wheat fields, gardens and fence rows of the Ukraine, Russia's breadbasket.

Bentzi was a businessman. He owned a grocery store and, with a partner, bought the local wheat crop and delivered it to other towns, where he then sold it to mills to be turned into flour. He was a busy young man with a lot going for him.

By noon, he was in Tarashta, tired but ready for what the day would bring. He was in Tarashta to purchase goods for his grocery store back in Boyerka. Tarashta was a bustling community when compared to the village of Boyerka. It had cobblestone streets. There were street signs, synagogues, clothing stores and fashionable shops in the center of town. Livery stables and small factories were clustered near the railroad station.

Tarashta's streets and roads were lined with palm trees that were very fragrant and considered an excellent cure for consumption. It was a town that catered to those seeking a cure for tuberculosis, one of the most widespread diseases of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the trees attracted the sick from throughout the area.

Bentzi walked along the palm-lined streets, past the pharmacy and bakery to the general store that was right in the center of town. He was there to purchase linens, wine and seltzer for his store in Boyerka.

The general store was the most beautiful and important store in Tarashta. It was owned by Bella Bazhant, daughter of Chaim "The Dayan" Feldberg.

As Bentzi came through the front door he noticed a small and delicate dark-haired young woman behind the counter, toward the rear of the store. She too was in her early twenties. He smiled warmly and bowed politely. How beautiful she is, he thought. Her name was Sarah Feldberg, daughter of Moshe Feldberg, granddaughter of Chaim "The Dayan" Feldberg of Tarashta.

Before the year was up, a matchmaker had made the match between Sarah Feldberg and Bentzi Kruglack, the wedding was held and the marriage consummated. Their first child, Hyman Kruglack, was born the following year.

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