Tsiveh Gordin

Sylvia Berman

Tela Cohn Zasloff
writer and editor

Front cover: Photograph of old section of Rezekne, Latvia, by Karen Zasloff.
Back cover: Photograph of Sylvia Berman's afghans, by Michael Adler.
Cover designer: Tela Zasloff

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Birches

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When I think of the country Grandma came from, I think first of birch trees. On my walks home from high school in the 1950s, when I stopped off at Grandma's and Grandpa's house, she would sometimes mention how much she had loved walking among the birches near the Baltic shore of Riga and along the river in her home town to the east, Rezekne. She called it Rezhitsa, its Russian name as it was in 1911, the year she left for America. I have photos of her taken in 1934 during her first—and only—visit back to her family since she had left. In one photo she is wearing a striped beach robe and sitting near birches with her nephews. In July 2000, traveling to Latvia and Russia with Karen, my youngest daughter, I leaned against birches along the river in the old section of Rezekne. The silver trunks grew close together, 15 feet tall and upright, the bark peeling back over layers of memory.

Grandma often mentioned what happy memories she had of swimming in the Baltic outside Riga. When I was 15, she visited our family vacationing in Atlantic City (she was 63, the age I am now) and told us, in her loud, musical voice that rose high when she was excited, how good it was for us to breathe the salt air and swim in the waves. When she took us to the beach, she wore what we called "an old lady's bathing suit," with wide straps and a skirt that billowed out over the water ripples when she sat on the border between the waves and the sand. She also showed us how deftly she could change from her street clothes to her bathing suit on a public beach, all under a towel without showing any bare skin. She had learned this as a child on family outings. We tried to do it under her instruction, but soon gave it up as too much bother.

In 1937, a year before I was born, Grandpa and Grandma had bought a cottage on the Raystown River near their Altoona home and the movies of the family's river activity there, taken by Uncle Arnold, center on the large, heavy rowboat that Grandpa used for fishing. I often say that the only water activity I really enjoy is rowing—which must come from my four- and five-year-old memories of my aunts and uncles and cousins having what seemed to me a constant party in that big boat. To get to the boat dock, we had to walk down a steep flight of creaking wooden stairs. I remember holding onto my mother's arm with one hand and onto the railing with the other, stepping slowly down the wet boards in rubber bathing sandals, in a dark blue wool bathing suit. The boat bottom was always full of water that we bailed out with coffee cans, then we pushed the oars against the bank of tree roots and began to make our way, slowly, across the river.

The water was consistently mucky with leaves and river bottom that my father highly disapproved of and that took heavy washing afterward to remove from our clothing and "all the cracks," as my mother put it. The games from the boat were standard, with constantly varying rules: jumping off, pushing relatives in, splashing, racing with neighbors' rowboats, sighting old tires and maybe fish at the bottom, feeling the water grow colder as we rowed out to the center, watching and counting dragonflies, trailing fingers and toes so quietly that there were no ripples.

I was allowed to help with the rowing when I grew big enough to push against the boat bottom with the soles of my feet. The dark green wood of the boat felt warm against my legs and under my fingers encircling the oar grips. I was very proud when an uncle told me that I was a good rower. I was not attracted by or interested in the fishing aspect of the rowboat—purposely keeping myself ignorant of the whole process--and was instructed to stay away from Grandpa's fishing equipment. Nevertheless, I once picked up a multi-hook assembly lying on the front step of the cottage and promptly got one of the hooks caught in the heel of my hand. It was a superficial puncture and easy for Grandpa to

remove, but the ease and speed with which the hook curved into my skin frightened me and made me permanently sympathetic with the fish. My favorite contact with wildlife was to sit very still on a rock near the side of the cottage, watching the chipmunks run in and out of the lattice work along the foundation and trying to distinguish individuals.

I have no memory of Grandma's swimming in the river or rowing the boat, although she must have done so since she had loved being on the river in her childhood. But housing and feeding family and friends every summer was a tiring, full-time job for her, so that doing the leisure-time, outdoor things she must have loved—swimming, berry picking, walking, rowing—would have to have been postponed. To my childhood mind, the daily chores were a novelty and seemed, again, like a party, with so many cousins and young uncles and aunts to do them with: hiking to a central pump and carrying back buckets of water, before Grandpa got indoor plumbing; using the outhouse after shouting through the door or peeking through the cracks; stepping in the deep muck being dug in preparation for installing pipes to the kitchen and bathroom; helping Grandma shell peas; picking berries, under my mother's instruction and explanation of the difference between black raspberries and black berries.

And then the games: badminton over a net tied to thick tree trunks; swinging in, and fighting over the hammock; playing catch on the dirt road out front with a blue rubber ball with a yellow strip around the center; my mother's trying to teach me embroidery, although I was not facile or patient with a needle and thread; card games among the adults on the green oilskin-covered table on the front screened porch; Parcheesi and Chinese Checkers; darts; croquet; singing and home movies in front of the fireplace; running after my cousin who was three years older, fruitlessly trying to get his attention and to do what he was doing.

And, in spite of the crowded quarters, feeling private and safe as I fell asleep on a small mattress under the front window to the screened porch, listening to the adults talking in low voices and playing cards. Before falling asleep I remember staring at the ceiling crossed with wooden beams, and focusing on the shiny three-inch white ceramic cylinders that were nailed to the beams and passed the electrical wires from one outlet to another. When we recently stripped the ceiling of our present house and discovered those same kind of cylinders nailed to the beams, I insisted they remain in place and look up at them regularly.

I have two memories of private moments between Grandma and me at the cottage. In one, I am sitting beside her under a large tree, while she instructs me in shelling peas and lets me eat a few along the way. They are small and bright green and very sweet. In the second, I am sitting at the kitchen table spread with a red plaid oil cloth. Grandma is wearing an apron and walks to the ice box to pour me a glass of milk. She pours it into a wide, heavy, dark blue glass with ridges cut into it and says, "Milk always tastes better in a blue glass."

In her 1934 photos from her trip to Latvia and Russia, Grandma looks about the same, at age 44, as I remember her much later, although in the photos her hair is more severe and black rather than gray, she is not yet wearing glasses, and her figure is thinner although still full. She had a generous, plump body, like most of the eastern European Jewish women who emigrated to the United States during the first quarter of the 20th century. But in the 1934 photos, compared to most of her family and friends, she looks fashionably svelte, and noted proudly in her journal written during that trip, how often people told her that she looked good.

I asked her once if she were beautiful when she was young. She paused, then said, "Yes—I had lovely dark hair and

these same blue eyes." In her wedding photograph taken in 1912 when she was 21, her dark hair is tucked in smooth shiny bunches around her face, and her lips are thin and held together in stern seriousness, belied by the full cheeks and broad chin anticipating a smile, in turn belied by her eyes deeply set under black brows that almost join together across the center and turn down at the edges, adding a permanent sadness. When I think of her, it is always with this wide range of expressiveness in her face, its sternness softened when, at age 50, she stopped dyeing her hair black and allowed it to return to its natural gray and later, white. She had explained to my mother, "It's time for me to be gray."

She had early adopted the American notion that to be slim was preferable, and criticized us granddaughters when she thought we were getting too fat. She told us several times how much she regretted that one of our aunts, a talented dancer who had wonderfully thin legs as a preteen, "lost it all" when her thighs became "too thick". But Grandma was waging a fruitless battle against genetics. Her grandniece, whom Karen and I visited in St. Petersburg, had her same soft, round body, along with her emotional way of talking and riveting blue eyes under dark brows.

Grandma's posture was attentive, her head tilted toward whomever she was talking to. Her head tilt was also because she had lost most of her hearing in one ear, a result of having scarlet fever as a child. Her walk was lopsided. I remember that when she took my arm to have a walk and talk, she kept guiding me toward one side or the other, a habit that Grandpa always complained about. Although she reprimanded us to "sit straight like a mensch" in our chairs, she liked to sit crooked, on the edges, a habit that became a fatal one in her case: just before her 90th birthday, she fell from such a perch on the edge of her bed, broke her hip and died of an aneurism in the hospital after surgery.

In the birches section of old Rezekne, I took a photo of two boys in jeans and shirts, fishing with poles and string along where the river makes a bend and willow trees hang over the water. I later found, among Grandma's postcards from her trip to Latvia, a brown photo of a little boy fishing under trees along a bend of the Rezekne river. Instead of long pants and short hair, he is wearing a long, skirted blouse and his hair is cut in page boy style, but I like to think that the photo of him was taken in the same spot as mine.

Rezekne

I woke Karen up at six in our Riga hotel to get the 8:10 train to Rezekne. I had awakened at 4:30 because I was afraid we would miss the train and because I was worried that there would not be anything in Rezekne that would connect to Grandma. My anticipation was further put off by our missing the train because Karen had to rush back to the hotel to find her fanny pack with plane tickets, left under the bed clothes. We bought some mealy sandwiches at the station, then some good dark bread and cheese. (I remember Grandma's handing me bread like that, covered with homemade cottage cheese and sometimes a little taste of Grandpa's chopped herring.) We boarded the next train to Rezekne and headed east.

The pine woods we passed on the outskirts of Riga thinned into occasional trees dotting flat planted fields covered periodically by wheat stacks and wooden and concrete farm buildings. A two-lane road ran parallel to the train tracks for most of the trip. A dark mare and foal grazed near a cow whose ribs and backbone were showing. People on the train: A young man dressed in a sleeveless undershirt; short, heavy women in long shapeless skirts and loose mismatched tops; young girls in socks and high heels; men in neatly pressed short-sleeved shirts; one professor-type in a brown-gray print shirt, dark pants and suede

loafers, dark gray shaggy hair, refined features, doing a puzzle in a newspaper. I drew an outline of his long sharp nose.

Karen had noticed that, like Slovakia where she taught for two years, older people in Latvia seem to age faster than those of the same age in the U.S. In addition, the new democratization seems to make them surly and aggressive against their youth, who are taller, thinner, more fashionably dressed and becoming Westernized at a fast pace. The old shout at the young who don't give up their seats on public transport, or who move too slowly or jocularly in line. This happened to Karen herself while she was waiting in line to buy train tickets. "The older generation has to pay four times more than they used to for everything and their lives aren't better, they think. They resent their own young," she said.

We passed a small forest, the floor covered with ferns and moss. The air coming through the open train window was getting hotter. On arrival at the newly-painted Rezekne station we were launched from cosmopolitan Riga to provincial Latvia. In 1934, Grandma had also taken the train from Riga to Rezekne, to visit her brothers Hendel and Tsalel and their families. Her impression of her home village was the same as ours: she described it as "quiet and lonely" in her 1934 journal. She preferred Riga, the bustling, international city on the Baltic where she lived for five years with her sister Chaya's family and worked in a grocery store. This is where she became adept at wrapping packages with paper and string, a skill that her family later watched in admiration.

Riga was also the place where, for three years, she wrote to Grandpa, who was already in America. They had grown up together in the same household in Rezekne, since his family rented from hers. But beginning at age 12 he had gone to St. Petersburg to apprentice with a watchmaker and returned to Rezekne for only a brief time before emigrating to America at age 17. Two years later he began writing to her after hearing that she was still single and after a three-year correspondence, they became engaged. So at age 21, she launched herself into a new world across a sea and ocean.

But Rezekne was where she began. At the station, we lugged our bags into the office of a jovial, hefty woman with dyed red hair, who spoke Russian and assured us she would watch the bags all day until we boarded the train to St. Petersburg that evening. The bags were too scuffled-looking to attract thieves, she implied with a wave of her hand, which reminded me of Grandma's admonition when I once appeared carrying my pajamas and toothbrush in a paper bag: "People in our family don't carry their things around in old bags!" And that evening she had insisted on hand-washing the cotton top I was wearing, dismayed that I would consider wearing it again the next day slightly soiled.

We walked the six blocks from the Rezekne station into town, past evenly spaced cement and brick houses interspersed with a few older wooden buildings and many church spires in the distance. Grandma had commented to her children that she never got over the feeling of dread she had had as a child when hearing the bells ringing from those churches. In present-day Rezekne, the majority of the population is Roman Catholic, there is a new influx of Russian emigrés, and there is no remnant of the once-thriving Jewish community that had founded the town as a market place in the 18th century and had established 11 synagogues by the 20th. Under the czars, Rezhitsa was in a Pale of Settlement, an area set off as exclusively Jewish, the boundaries of which Jews could cross only with official permission. Between 1900 and 1934, the Jewish community of Rezekne had established a yeshiva, Yiddish and Hebrew schools, and their own social service organizations.

In the 1890s, 6,500 Jews formed 60% of the population. By 1935 there were 3,340 Jews forming 25.4% of the population, most of them merchants or artisans. In the summer of 1941, the Nazis occupied the town and murdered most of the resident Jews in a nearby forest.

We walked along what used to be a main street, Darzu, which, other than having the same name, did not look like the Darzu in the 1934 postcards Grandma brought back from her trip. The electricity poles were no longer quintuple-decker assemblages and the wooden buildings had been replaced by larger concrete ones.

We were looking for the oldest section of town which we assumed was along the river. Two women passers-by, who spoke some English and more Russian, earnestly directed us to both the old section and a hotel where we could have a good lunch. We started downhill toward the winding river, past people walking large dogs and planting in small gardens. We knew we were in the old section because the buildings were long, horizontal and made of wood laid in striped and diagonal patterns, the windows and corners trimmed in what I think of vaguely as northern European style. The largest wooden houses were those nearest to contemporary Rezekne—I imagined that the upscale residents of old Rezhitsa lived here. Then, as we wound down to the river basin, the houses grew more sparse and run-down, and were more like the houses where small merchants and cart drivers, like Grandma's father, would have raised their families at the beginning of the 20th century—giving me, for the first time, the feeling that I was in a place where Grandma grew up.

After walking in the quiet along the river and through the small birch woods, we headed for the most noticeable landmark of the town, sitting on a hill overlooking old Rezekne: a ruin of a castle fort, consisting of several piles of large stones about one-story high, still angled in vague wall outlines and framing the view with the remains of two arched windows. The oldest picture of Rezekne that the national photo archives could provide was a sketch of this ruin, done in the 18th century, that shows more rooms and windows. We took a photo from the ruin, heading over the old town and the river toward twin church spires in the distance. In many of the postcards Grandma brought from Rezekne, these church spires show up distinctly, the camera pointed in the same direction and at the same distance as ours. That she had so many of these shots may mean that this was a view she was attached to.

Sylvia Berman arrived in the Rezekne station at 8:30 in the evening of July 19, 1934 for a two-and-a-half-week stay following her initial two weeks in Riga. She was greeted by a crowd of welcomers holding bunches of flowers. "The same old burg, quiet and lonely," she wrote in her journal that night. She went to her brother's home, which she described as "a little primitive, but sweet. Clean white curtains. Great big plants on the floor. Table decorated with Jewish writing, sayings of welcome, flowers, eats, drinks. The whole crowd around the table sang songs of welcome."

Her first day she took a walk with her niece, Judith Gordin, who was in her late 20s and bore a strong resemblance to her aunt, especially around the eyes. Grandma went boating on the river with Aaron Gordin and swimming in "the old time place," which must have been either at a nearby lake or on the river. She walked with her brothers Hendel and Tsalel on the old Wipinga road and noticed how many more houses had been built over the 23 years since she had last been there. At Tsalel's for dinner that night, "the whole gang" was there, eating "blintzes, kishkes, what not!" That afternoon a childhood girl friend came to visit—"Talk, talk, and talk. My throat is sore."

This was the pattern of her visit—old walks and swims, seeing family and friends, reminiscing, late dinners with hours of talk and singing and going to bed at midnight, feeling elated and exhausted, familiar and estranged, and homesick for America at times. One long dinner evening was typical: "Beautiful moonlight. Sara Freida [Hendel's wife] and I sang all kinds of old time songs. Herr Gefshtayn came out with his violin. Played some classical pieces that I know. A crowd of boys and girls passed by singing songs. Was old-fashioned but merry and jolly. Gorgeous night, smell of night flowers. No feeling to go to bed."

Sometimes it rained but she liked that, too. "It poured rain over our heads. No street lights, no flashlight. Tramped in the soft thin mud like nobody's business. I did not mind it at all." She recognized she was swimming "in the very weather as when I was a child." Her brothers took her for a drive past the modernizations in town—"the new constructed building in the suburbs," "the old Upatovka mill now electrified. Lots and lots of new buildings.," the new hospital building and grounds that "makes the impression of an American institution," the paved streets and sidewalks, and flowers around Nikolaevs. Street. "The lake is more beautiful than ever," she wrote. "The school house is old and forgotten. The Talmud Torah house is forgotten."

She went to Viliany to see Cousins Fenia and Gris [unable to identify] and visited new relatives, the Epsteins, and her former employers and their families. There were visits to people whose relationship to her are unexplained, like her "old Mrs." and "Mume Gookels (poor soul)," or "the Burz girls" who served tea and "fresh homemade bulkas that take the prize."

Letters from her own family were vital. "Two more letters from home. What a pleasure! I'm not so lonely for home any more." Her last day in Rezekne she went boating with her nephews and nieces. That evening her niece Sima came from Riga and they ate potatoes with herring at Tsalel's house. Then she had to pack for her trip back to Riga, "to the sea shore." The morning of her departure, August 8, her family walked with her to the station. She was excited—and ready to leave: "Got up four thirty in the morning. Was afraid to miss the train. Beautiful morning, watched the sun rise in my native town. What a feeling!!"

There was a large porcelain plate hanging on the center wall in my grandparents' dining room, that I remember staring at all through my childhood. The outside edge was fluted and gilded in gold. On the plate itself was painted a scene that must have hit a nostalgic chord for my grandparents, who grew up together in the same household in Rezhitsa. A young peasant girl with long, dark hair and bare feet is leading a small boy with blond curly hair to the water's edge to bathe, looking down at him reassuringly as he reluctantly sticks his toes in the water. The boy is looking up at her with an agonized expression that suggests Madonna and Child paintings. In the background is a country landscape with wooden buildings and fields. It is done in nineteenth century romantic style, with a sentimentalism and soft colors that my grandparents must have associated with Russian art, the culture governing their childhood, the outside world that their insular Jewish community most strongly associated itself with.

Their attachment to Russia had several sources. They both knew the Russian language and continued speaking it to each other throughout their life together, although not as frequently as Yiddish or English. Grandma learned her Russian at the local public school, at the insistence of her mother who thought it was important, an unusual move for a Jewish family with a modest income. Grandpa learned his Russian while doing his five-year apprenticeship as a watchmaker in St. Petersburg, from ages 12 to

17. And Grandma's youngest brother Samuel settled in St. Petersburg by the time he was in his 20s. Other pieces of art I remember looking at in their home were chosen (by Grandpa, in most cases) with the same taste for romantic refinement, similar to the nineteenth century art I saw in the Russian national museum in St. Petersburg.

After I visited Rezekne, especially the quiet river area in the old town, I thought that the painted dish could have related to a scene from their end-of-the-nineteenth-century childhood as they liked to remember it. The connection was strengthened when I discovered that Grandma's favorite lullaby—in Russian, "Vykhozhu"—was based on a poem by Lermontov, a Russian romantic poet of the first half of the nineteenth century. The first stanza translates [translation by my son-in-law's father, Michael Kandel]:

> I go out alone on the road;
> The sandy path gleams through the mist;
> The night is still. The wilderness listens to God,
> And star talks to star.

My mother, now 89, remembers the tune perfectly. The connection between Grandma's past and Russia became even stronger when I found an illustration in one of Lermontov's books of poetry of a young boy with blond curly hair in the almost identical posture of the boy on the plate, painted in the same style with the same agonized expression on his face.

After Grandma died, my youngest aunt, who was distributing Grandma's possessions, gave me that painted plate, which now hangs in our dining room. When I recently took it off the wall to read the back, I was surprised to see "Limoges," and on the front, "d'après Delobbe," establishing that the artist was French, not Russian. But the style is clearly the nineteenth century period of romanticism in western and eastern European art into which Grandma was born.

But Grandma's nostalgia for her quiet Rezekne was less powerful than her eagerness to take on a bigger world. She had been there long enough and was restless to leave. She wrote vigorously in her journal the night she arrived back in Riga: "Aron Shneer came to the station. It felt grand to be back to this blessed sea shore. Chaya was so happy to see me again that she cried (for a change). Spent a happy afternoon with a lot of relatives and friends."

Beginning the trip in Riga

When we boarded the New York plane to eastern Europe, I was excited but worried about whether I could get a living sense of Grandma's past from the changed Latvia and Russia of the present. She also felt both excited and anxious when beginning her 1934 visit, although for a different reason: it had been 23 years since she had last seen her family. Her older brothers, Hendel and Tsalel, were already remote in her memory; her sister Chaya was 48 instead of 25; her closest brother, Samuel, lived in Leningrad; her parents had died, her father in 1906, her mother before 1920. Her home ground, Czarist Russia, had become Latvia and, although she makes no mention of it in her journal or letters, there had been a rightist coup a month before she arrived, the Ulmanist coup of May 1934, that led to the arrest of the leading members of the Zionist party and the beginning of restrictions on Jewish activity and movement inside Latvia. When she arrived in Latvia in 1934, Jews formed 4.7% of the population, numbering 93,500. When we arrived in 2000, that whole Jewish community had been virtually lost, either to the Holocaust or emigration.

I stare at Grandma's family photos until they turn flat. I try to guess about people from facial expressions and ways of dressing and posing for the camera, and about her relationship with each one. There is a clear family resemblance among them in the eyes, the same sharpness and warm irony that a friend saw in Grandma's wedding photograph. When we arrived in Riga, the city charmed us but I hurried to the archives and registries to find documentation and photographs. The staff people recognized that their records were precious treasure to us roots-seekers—and there were many of us there, from all over the world.

Our first day in Riga, July 3, the Old Town was fully dressed out for tourists and the young Latvians were on parade all day and through the light-filled summer night that lasted until 1AM. They moved around in handsome clusters, stunningly attired in European chic, thin and tall and angular, looking somberly confident and haughty. In our casual American traveling clothes, we felt underdressed and sloppy. There was an anti-Russian feeling that we noticed during conversations at the Internet Café and in restaurant-bars, buttressed by the fact that about 40% of the population in Riga are Russian immigrants, a strong grounds for resentment among the Latvians. The other look of Riga, apart from the newly painted Old Town, was one of large concrete and older wooden buildings, wide streets, and spacious parks and plazas, giving off an air of bustle and enterprise.

At the Jewish Museum and Archives, a former mansion in the center of Riga, I was given copies of 1930s photographs of Jewish school children in Rezekne, three of whom were named Gordin. The woman taking our entrance fee said that her husband's family was from Rezekne—we didn't have a chance to ask her if they survived the war. The exhibit rooms were small, displaying some 18th and 19th century illustrations and records of Jews as a nationality group. One room was devoted to the Holocaust in Riga. At least 24,000 Jews from Riga were murdered, most during the period of mass extermination in November and December of 1941. There had been a deportation and exodus of several thousand to the USSR in 1940 and in June 1941, right before the Nazi occupation of Latvia. Some of Grandma's nephews and nieces and their children survived the war this way, mostly in concentration camps in Siberia. Her sister Chaya and her husband and children, the Shneers, were sent to the Riga ghetto by the Nazis. Her nephew Aaron Shneer was his family's only survivor.

Aaron Shneer was one of the first persons Sylvia Berman saw as her train arrived in Riga at the end of June 1934. She shouted, "Isser!", mistaking him for his father. Aaron was in his late 20s and paid his aunt courtly attention her entire stay. "Riga at last," she wrote in her journal. "Sister, brothers, brother-in-law, nephews, friends. Tears, happiness and what not!"

She had begun her voyage in the States with nervous excitement: "I am all excited, sort of restless, could not sleep. Got out of bed at four o'clock in the morning." She had a tearful send-off at the Altoona station from her "dear pals," then boarded the train to Philadelphia and then to New York, where she would sail for Hamburg on the Manhattan. In Philadelphia, her sister-in-law Edith forced her to shop for an evening gown for the ship—"we bought a dress which I liked very little." Grandpa went with her to New York and took her for breakfast at Childs the day of the sailing. She was elated by the big city and the big voyage ahead—"Oh! This gorgeous section of New York. A beautiful day. The air is so refreshing. A taxi took us to the pier. What excitement! So many people! One mass of baggage, noise, lines, lines and lines. On board ship—crowds and crowds. One mass of people, flowers, eyes full of tears, happiness and yet

sadness. The ship leaves out the last whistle. Visitors must go off. The first move."

The voyage was exciting at times, and at times, lonely. At first, the adventure of it—meeting people, dancing, dressing up (she felt good in the new evening gown—"I look well, very much in place."), coping with sea sickness, games on deck, films ("talkies with Elissa Landy and Adolph Menjou"), watching the sea ("Gazing on waves. What a nerve-suiting feeling!"). The ship docked at Cobb, Ireland—"The Irish tremble. They are getting off." The fewer passengers remaining looked lonely. Le Havre, the next stop, reminded her of Rezhitsa. At Hamburg she boarded a train to Berlin, then Tilsit, then Lithuania, then Riga. Between Berlin and Tilsit, she had "a terrible night, sitting position, in stuffy car. No water to get washed, creepy feelings, smelly lavatory. Eh!!!" After crossing the border into Latvia, "My heart is ready to jump out any minute." She later told her family that she did not want to return back through Germany because all the big shops were boarded up with "Juden" signs on them.

The first morning after her arrival in Riga, she walked through the downtown with Aaron Shneer and niece Judith Gordin. "Riga does not look the same to me," was her only journal comment. That evening they went to the sea shore, to Chaya's summer home, where she was welcomed by "brothers, sister, brother-in-law, nephews, nieces, strangers, new friends, old friends, all around me."

Chaya's house was a two-story, horizontal clapboard building with a shingled roof and ornamented, large windows that opened out on all sides of the house. Across the front were strung letters made of flowers and greens, spelling and misspelling in a combination of languages "CILA—WELLCOME". "CILA" was her Yiddish name, Tsiveh, in Cyrillic letters. Two flags, one American and the other probably Latvian, are propped against the welcome sign. On a side panel was hung the Hebrew or Yiddish letters "Kadosh havah". In the photos taken of this occasion, the whole welcome crowd and Grandma are looking out the second floor windows. She later kept these photos in an album Judith had given her, with a silver owl and silver plaque on the cover engraved with the initials "CB" (for Civa Berman) and the German words: "Fur Erinnerung [For remembering always] von Judit, Riga, 20.X.34."

Grandma wrote in her journal: "Sister's home: beautiful. Gorgeous decoration of Wellcome. I feel nervous, things so strange to me. Table decorated with flowers. Cakes, crengel and all kinds of cold eats and drinks. The crowd gathers around the table, drink, eat, happy outbursts, good wishes. Happy songs to suit the occasion. Talked with sister and Judith the night through. Daylight at 1AM."

Then began the rounds of visiting, shows and concerts, walks, picnics and grand meals, singing, and swims that filled her schedule. "We went swimming in the ocean. The kids think it's great that I can swim. Dinner on the outside around a big round table. No flies. Smell of sunburned needle trees and pine from the nearby woods. White birch trees around us." She heard a Hungarian woman violinist: "The symphony and the conductor were divine. The violinist certainly can produce. Came home at 12:30 tired but happy." She visited surrounding areas, like the Kamerin spa: "The air smells like matches. The water flows with health. The people come with glasses and bottles and drink this water with faith in its promise. . . .The grave of the 93 Russian soldiers that lost their lives in the world war defending Kamerin left an impression on me."

She ran into old acquaintances, some changed, some not. "I got ready to go swimming. I hear the gang holler—'Tante!! Shneler, shneler!' When I came downstairs, I found a man sitting in the parlor. They told me to take a good look at him and 'Oh!!' I

screamed—'Shmerl!' A boy from the crowd of my young days. I was so happy to see him. We had a heart-to-heart talk. He is married to the girl he loved, is still in love with her, but, poor fellow, he is sick. He is a veteran of the world war and suffers from a lot of things."

She had periods of loneliness ("Got up in the morning with a headache, had the blues, lonely for home."), that changed to elation when letters from home arrived. She picked wild flowers and raspberries and took afternoon naps. She had her hair finger-waved and saw a dentist about her teeth (which gave her trouble her whole life, until she finally had them pulled and replaced by dentures). Aaron took her dancing and to cafés and to the beach, left flowers in her room and introduced her to his friends. "Aaron, I and gang went boating on the beautiful river—What gorgeous woods! What wonderful scenario! We rowed for hours in this glory."

Sima was married to Grandma's nephew Rachmiel in 1934 (Sima was 23) and she remembers Grandma's visit well. Sima greeted her at the train station on her arrival in Riga, along with Grandma's sister Chaya, nephews Aaron, Rachmiel, Abrasha, and niece Judith. This visit was the last time Sima saw her Aunt Sylvia. Sima remembers her as smart and clever, liking to joke and laugh about herself, always putting herself in jokes as if they were happening to her. The family, especially Isser, Chaya's husband, had been upset in 1911 that "such a beautiful girl would go to the U.S. only engaged, but not married." Sima remembers seeing the photos that Grandma had taken of herself in the U.S. as soon as she got off the ship, sent back to her family with the message: "Frum mir, di glichlicheh Tsifka [From me, the very happy Tsifka]."

St. Petersburg

Karen and I bought the most luxurious sleeping accommodations on the Rezekne-St. Petersburg train, a private sleeping car in which we were interrupted only once by passport and visa checks from stiff, polite border-crossing officials. We arrived in St. Petersburg at 10 AM. It was a change from Riga. The Russians walking the streets with us were heavier, shorter, jollier to foreigners and much more enthusiastic about eating ice cream, at any hour. We spent hours in a restaurant-bar called The Seagull in English, where, all evening, a band of Russians played jazz, mostly Dixieland, authentically and enthusiastically. The pianist and the bass/washtub-and-string/trumpet/vocalist were especially high spirited, the latter wearing a flowered bandana around his head. Karen did a drawing of the scene.

The city's fantastic gold-domed church spires appeared in every view across the long, winding curves of the Neva river that, because there are so few bridges, makes walking anywhere in the city longer than you would think in looking at a map. Our tourist agent was an urbane 25-year-old who spoke a British-accented English. He met us at the station and arranged us into our hotel, a large one overlooking the Neva and full of busloads of well-dressed German tourists. He phoned Mira, Grandma's grandniece and my second cousin, to set up our visit with her. He talked in a steady, amiable flow about his two visits to the U.S. for high school and then medical training at National Institutes of Health in Washington. The only museum we had time for was the National Museum of Russian Art. I particularly liked the 19th and 18th extravagant portraits of Russian nobility, battle scenes, and romantic pastoral vistas.

At the suggestion of a friend, Karen arranged for a Russian woman, an English teacher in her early 30s, to be the

interpreter for our meeting with Mira. Paulina did her job with warmth and sensitivity, and spoke English with only a slight hesitation.

Mira

Mira, born in 1934, is the granddaughter of Grandma's youngest brother, Samuel, who was born around 1885. In the earliest photograph I have of him—in formal studio pose--he is 13, dressed in a heavy double-breasted suit and tie, his thick hair neatly smoothed down, one elbow resting on a pedestal. He has the Gordin family deep set eyes and turned down brows, and a handsome, even beautiful face and thick wavy hair that stayed that way in all his photos through to his old age. In a 1905 photograph, he is standing with his sister Chaya on a cobblestone street in St. Petersburg. Chaya is wearing an elegant Persian lamb coat, hat and muff, and Samuel, a bowler hat and long wool coat with a velvet collar. He has grown a neat mustache and Van Dyck beard. In a 1934 formal photograph of himself with his wife Rose and two children, Aaron and Fenya (Mira's mother), his attire continues to be fashionable, the lace edge of a handkerchief showing in his breast pocket, the collar of his broad-striped shirt heavily starched, and a ring set with a stone on the fifth finger of his left hand. He was thin throughout his life, always held himself upright, and, in almost every photograph, is wearing a suit with a handkerchief in his breast pocket.

Mira described her grandfather to us. He was an angry, impatient man with a hot temper. He left Rezhitsa for St. Petersburg about 1905 and became a tailor. Mira remembers that when she was about three, he allowed her to sit under the table while he did his work (he called her "Mousha") and listen to his songs. In one of her favorites, he sang, "My little daughter will go to the market and buy a little turkey for you." (When I was about 10, I liked to sit beside Grandma at her sewing machine while she showed me the running stitch, but I couldn't coordinate the treadle and hand wheel properly and was a little afraid. What I liked best was to watch her work it. It was a beautiful machine, with gold letters and curlicues painted on its black shining body parts, and all its mechanisms were in plain view and made absolute sense.)

Mira told us that her grandfather Samuel liked to sing and had a fine voice—he sang prayers in Hebrew and many Yiddish songs. Probably some of his favorites were the same as Grandma's—"Tum Balalaika," "Rozhinkes Mit Mandlen," "Oifn Pripetshik." She always liked minor keys, my mother told me. I remember that she liked to sing, hesitating at first, then singing slowly, swaying, looking in the distance. Her characteristic self-mockery extended to her singing. She told the story of trying to comfort one of her crying babies by singing, then hearing a knock at the door from a neighbor who complained, not about the baby's crying but about her singing. I found that story hard to believe because her singing and humming while she worked, always sounded fine to me, even the soap commercials from the radio ("D-U-Z, D-U-Z, put DUZ in your washing machine, see your clothes come out so clean. . ."), which made her marvel at how something so dumb could trap your mind all day—"They try to drive you crazy," she would laugh.

Mira remembered that Samuel had several books by Sholem Aleichem but no collection of books in Yiddish. Grandpa had one of the largest collection of Yiddish books and newspapers in central Pennsylvania but Grandma's reading must have been squeezed in at the edges of her busy family duties. Nevertheless, she was well read, particularly in Yiddish and Russian classics. I remember when Dr. Zhivago was first published in English in the late 1950s, she studied the copy I gave her and explained, with relish and in detail why, in many places, the translation had to be wrong because she recognized what the original Russian must

have been. She loved to talk about the nuances of word meanings and how they differed between languages.

In a 1937 photo taken in Leningrad, Mira, age 3, is sitting on her grandfather's knee in front of a garden; he has his arm around her. After the war, when he was in his 70s, he retired to a chicken farm near Leningrad (formerly St. Petersburg).

According to Mira, her great-grandfather (and mine), Aaron Shlomo Gordin, came to St. Petersburg, grew ill, and died there. She didn't know the date but said that he was buried in the Jewish cemetery, called, in Russian, Preobrazhenskoye, where Samuel was also buried. Mira's grandmother Rose and her mother Fenya were buried in the Ninth of January cemetery. Mira's brother Marek—who was hot-tempered like his grandfather—had died, as had her husband, Nahum Strasvogel, who worked at a Leningrad research institute. Her only remaining immediate family is her son David, in his early 30s, married and living in St. Petersburg. Mira identified the wife of Samuel's son, Aaron, as "Tcherkes" but it was unclear whether this were a family name or a national delineation of some kind. She described this wife as being half Russian and, if the interpreter understood her correctly, not Jewish.

We visited Mira in her own apartment, at her invitation. To get there, we had to walk through run-down courtyards of cement high-rises, the paint peeling from the surfaces. Several women who looked to be in their 70s were sitting on a bench in Mira's courtyard entrance way. It had just stopped raining and besides deep puddles, the only fixtures in the yard were two wooden playhouses with peaked roofs, a sliding board and a rusted frame for swings. We followed Mira up the stone steps of a dark stairway to her apartment. She had come down to meet us, walking slowly and panting, explaining that she was in ill health. She was diabetic but not getting insulin (She didn't explain why not.) and was also recovering from a car accident. She had dressed up for this occasion, in a blue short sleeved sweater, black long skirt and slippers, and delicate gold earrings with a light orange stone. Her dark, gray streaked hair was gathered in a bun at the nape of her neck, and straggled out around her ears and forehead.

There were three small rooms in her apartment, her possessions neatly arranged but crowded, with heavy furniture of dark wood, heavy cut glass objects in a cabinet and on shelves, several sets of books, an award given to her husband for service to the government, dark patterned rugs, and a flowered tablecloth. On her living room wall were landscapes that were difficult to see since there was only one outside window.

She reminded me of Grandma in certain ways: soft, smooth skin; broad chin; blue eyes under dark, turned down brows; short rounded body; dark gray hair pulled back; speaking with intense emotion. But Mira was bent over and sad, even bitter, her eyes filling with tears often and her manner restless and agitated. Our visit obviously had demanded a lot from her, the demands self-imposed and extravagant. She served us boiled chicken on a flowered plate, canned fish, tomatoes and cucumbers, two kinds of bread, a small round yellow coffee cake with raisins and powdered sugar, cranberry drink, vodka, cheese and meat slices on lettuce, sweet cottage cheese with strawberry jam, soft boiled eggs, and tea. All this was set out at once, filling the table, with far too much silverware for us three. She told us she had gotten the best of all she could find, adding dryly, "I don't eat like this every day."

The discomfiting aspect of this spread was that I was the only one eating. Mira had already eaten (because of her diabetic condition, she explained), Karen was trying to cut down, and Paulina, our interpreter, was too busy interpreting. I did my best, the food was tasty, and the cottage cheese, dark bread and boiled

the food was tasty, and the cottage cheese, dark bread and boiled chicken were familiar family dishes. I overate carefully, to a modest degree. Mira complained, saying that I had eaten nothing. When we carried the dishes to her kitchen sink and offered to wash and dry them, she looked sad and said she had no hot water—without explaining why. Did she heat her water on the stove, then?

We sat at the table for almost two hours, as Mira moved around constantly, agitated, happy and sad. She brought out piles of photos and mementos of her family, including her mother Fenya's journal written at age 12, with drawings. I told her, "Mira, you should put all these in a book." She answered, in tears, "I don't feel like doing anything." She talked steadily for the almost three hours we were there, alternating between family history and the sad conditions of her present life.

I wondered how much the harsh political climate in which she grew up had created this moroseness in her and how much such a view came from her basic character and personal circumstances. I compared her story with Bella's, another second cousin who is about the same age as Mira and I and is also Grandma's grandniece, the granddaughter of Grandma's brother Hendel. Bella was born in Latvia but went with her parents, Rachmiel and Sima, to the USSR during the mass exodus and deportation of Jews from Latvia in 1940 and 1941. She returned to Latvia with her mother and brother Michael after the war; her father had been killed as a member of the Soviet army. Sima married Rachmiel's first cousin, Aaron Shneer, the only survivor of his immediate Shneer family, who adopted Bella and her brother. Bella married and lived in Riga until the 1970s when she and her husband Isaac and son Isser emigrated to the United States. Sima and Aaron emigrated to Israel. In 1980, after Aaron died in Israel, Sima joined Bella and her family in the States, where Michael had also emigrated a few years earlier. Despite health problems for some, they are all living comfortably.

So both Bella and Mira spent childhood years in the Soviet Union but Bella did not live there long. She returned to Latvia at the end of the war while Mira's young adulthood and family life felt the full force of the Stalin period. I assumed that this period had been a strain on family trust and people's ways of relating to each other, but Mira made no mention of this in her long description of her present ills. She spoke fondly of her past, while her account of the present was bitter. What struck me the most powerfully was how much all three of us—Mira, Bella and I—are products of our grandparents' decisions about where and how to live, and that Grandma, of the three Gordin siblings, was able to free herself early enough from the trap of European events that, had she not, would have caught her and perhaps even me in circumstances the same as, or worse than those of my two second cousins.

Mira spoke to us repeatedly of ingratitude from family, of not being appreciated, which nudged us to repeat how much we appreciated the trouble she had gone to for our visit. When I gave her two envelopes of $100 each, from me and an aunt and uncle, her eyes filled up again. She said she would use the money to get new teeth. I hugged her several times during the visit, because she looked as if she hadn't been hugged often. She gave us an armload of gifts at the door: a traditional Russian wooden painted spoon; several books on art exhibits; bags of rich chocolates, individually wrapped. Then she handed me the handkerchief her grandfather Samuel often wore in his breast pocket. It was surprisingly delicate and fine for a man's handkerchief—thin linen slightly starched and crocheted around the edges with lace. I hugged her again, promising that our daughter Beth would carry the handkerchief at her wedding the next month.

On August 6, at Chaya's summer home, Grandma's nephew Abrasha said to her, "Tante, do you want to go to town? Uncle Samuel is going to call from Leningrad!" Grandma did not feel like going, she reported in her journal—"I could not stand the excitement. Chaya says it's a shame not to go. So we dressed in a hurry and went. I was happy I went. It was thrilling and painful to hear his voice over the telephone. He asked me if I can talk Russian. I said, 'Da, da, I can.' I thought about it the whole night."

She and Chaya took a train from Riga to Leningrad to visit Samuel. Their preparations for the trip were hectic: "Packed the necessary things in the suit case, the rest in the trunk. Everybody is very busy, Aaron most of all. He is like a girl around his mother. Packs her things, makes sandwiches, hollers at the younger kids and kids me about a lot of things. I am all excited and do nothing. Sister made some taglech to take along to Leningrad. Everybody tries to pass their opinion. I think they are trying a little too much." Leave-taking is not easy: "I said goodbye to this wonderful summer home where I spent so many happy days. Looked at the gorgeous river with its green beach and pine needle trees and marched with Chaya to the station. We walked through the sunburned pine tree woods. The air was delightful. We didn't say anything to each other."

In the afternoon, the whole family saw them off at the Riga train station. "I felt that my family, too, ought to be here to see me off, Abe especially," she wrote in her journal. But she was elated to be traveling alone with her sister: "At long last sister and I are alone. We fall into each other's arms and cry and laugh at the same time. We are so happy! We talked things over and over again. Couldn't always do that because somebody was always around." The weather was clear and they slowly went east through Latvia. "Stations very cute in the Latvian spirit. Light colored, most ivory. Flowers around it, most of them white flax. Train moves on and moves on. We talk and talk. It's getting dark."

As the train neared the Russian border, "my heart almost stops. At last Ostrov, Russia. Porters come in to take down our baggage for inspection. They look Russian—they talk Russian—they are Russians!! I am home! In Russia! My heart cries out, what a thrill! I don't believe it. I am dreaming." She is nervous during the customs inspection and is glad Chaya is with her. "As we go into the inspecting room, the first thing your eyes fall on is a big portrait of Lenin, Stalin and many other Russian leaders. A man and young girl at the counter start to inspect. An official walks around back and forth. I am a little afraid, I don't know why. The man inspected sister's baggage and everything was O.K. The girl inspected mine and like a woman inspected everything thoroughly and found the new woolen shirts that do not belong to a woman. The verdict was that I must pay duty, which means that each dollar that I paid for the shirts, I must pay one dollar, 25 cents duty. I gave them two dollars and fifteen cents (this was all I had with me)."

She was glad to get back into the train. They got their bedding ("a mattress, two pillows, a nice blanket, one under sheet, one inner sheet, everything snowy white, looked very inviting"), locked their door, "got undressed and stretched out." "I slept very good. I needed it."

They arrived in Leningrad at 10 AM. "Is it true? Sister walked out into the station to see if anybody came to meet us. I looked around and pretty soon I heard a voice. 'Tsiva—Tsiva!' That was brother Samuel. He clasped me in his arms. I look at him. He looks at me. He looks so strange. His Russian work shirt worn over the trousers. He is very thin and pale, tired looking and not shaved. Outside we meet Rose, still as pretty as ever. Her cheeks red, her eyes blue, her hair still blond and wavy, dressed

poorly. Then came Ariosha their son. He, too, is pale and thin. He is very excited with his aunts." A representative from the Intourist office takes them to their hotel, the Hotel Victoria, to register.

The hotel is splendid—"So beautiful, so interesting, so colorful, with its gorgeous old fashioned furniture. The servants so uniformed, so different. Everybody talks English. They make you feel at home." With other tourists from England and America, they signed up for several tours, to the Hermitage and Isakiensk. [?] They had a large meal "under the sound of divine music". They went to Samuel's house for the first of several visits, but there is no mention in Grandma's journal of what was said or done there. She and Chaya returned to their hotel for a late supper, at 11:30 PM, serenaded by an orchestra playing jazz.

Grandma's journal entries focus on the tourist sites they visited in Leningrad, sometimes accompanied by Samuel. She took studious notes on both the remnants of former czarist Russia and the new institutions of the Revolution and the Soviet Union. (Perhaps she suspected that she might be asked to speak about all this back home—which she was. Grandpa arranged for her to speak at a socialist meeting, at which she did well, although greatly worried about it beforehand.) She noted: Peter Paul fortress, with the graves of the czars, "prison cells, solitary confinement, the lower room where Vera Figner was confined, and Count Peter Kropotkin, Morozoff and other great revolutionists; the Museum of Russian Art, pictures of the tsars, grand dukes and duchesses"; Alexander Park and Revolution Square, "the street cars crowded with workers"; "workers' kitchen: 1,000 meals, built in 1930, 450 that come in contact with food, doctor exams, showers, change of clothing, minimum cost for a meal is 60 and those who earn more, must pay more, the children's dining room where mothers cannot come in—cost is six kopecks."

"Care of pregnant women, exhibition of growth of the embryo, all the preventatives against child birth, abortion instruments. Birth control is legal in Russia. Abortions are not encouraged but done any time it is wanted."

The only mention of Chaya's reaction to their visit is her discomfort with the English spoken on a bus ride: "Had a grand time in the bus. The people all English speaking. Poor sister, she couldn't take part in the conversation and laughter." Samuel takes them to some of these places but seems unwell. "Samuel waiting in the lobby. Poor brother, so tired." In the formal family photograph he sends to Grandma a few months after her visit, Samuel looks in excellent health, and all are dressed in well-made clothing. Samuel and his son Aaron look especially handsome and self-assured. But about 50 years later, after Grandma died, one of my aunts was told that, as a result of the visit from his American sister, Samuel was put under house arrest for two years by the Soviet authorities.

When Grandma said goodbye to her family in Latvia in 1934 and returned to the States, she sensed, in the background, the dangerous political climate of her old homeland. She wrote to Emma, her oldest daughter, of the sadness of saying goodbye to her family and yet the joy of returning to America: "Lots of kisses & tearful eyes & everything that goes with it. I didn't cry. I was very depressed and wished this shall be over. Poor sister did not cry either. But I shall never forget how she looked and how she ran after the train. When the train left Riga I broke out in tears. I was left to my own thoughts and grief, and yet happiness that I am going home to my family." She describes the 12-hour train from Berlin to Paris as full of silent people, noticing a French couple, a Polish aristocrat and a Polish Jew. She is happy to see the French border officials, "their uniforms and conduct belonging to a democratic land", then bursts out: "I do hate the fascist countries. They make me sick with their whole rigamarole."

Family History

Family History

Where Grandma's parents and grandparents were born is unknown, but we do know that she and her siblings were born in the 1880s and 90s in Rezhitsa (now Rezekne, Latvia), a small town in what was then Vitebsk province in the Russian, czarist empire. We also know, from the Latvian National Registry, that two of her father's brothers, Israel/Laib and Faivish, lived in the Rezhitsa area and that Faivish was married there.

Rezhitsa was the district town of the province, at a railroad junction between St. Petersburg and Warsaw. The town's oldest historical monument is the remains of a fortress castle built in the ninth century by the Latgalians. The Jewish community was founded in Rezhitsa after 1775 by Jews who had been banished from Makashani, a village 18 kms away. They set up the Holy Ark in the Beit Midrash they established in their new town. In 1802 there were 533 Jewish inhabitants and 187 Christians in the town. In 1815 (probably during the lifetime of Grandma's paternal grandfather, Reb Hendel Gordin) there were 1,072 Jews in Rezhitsa, 90% of the total population.

The rabbi of the community from 1861 to 1900 was Rabbi Yitzhak Zioni (also known as Rabbi Itzele Lutsin). He was the son of Rabbi Naftali Zioni of Lutsin (later Ludza) and was the author of the essay "Olat Yitzhak." Beginning in 1900 two rabbis officiated in Rezhitsa: Rabbi Dusovich served the poorer members and Rabbi Haim Lubocki, the richer ones. A third rabbi, Yaakov Pollak, was appointed by the Russian government. The Jewish community established a charitable fund, a public kitchen for the needy, an organization for visiting the sick and an old-age home for the poor. By the time of Grandma's birth, in 1890, there were 11 synagogues in Rezhitsa, the largest, built of brick around 1882.

Until 1900, the children studied in Jewish schools, Hadarim, which also taught secular subjects, and in a Talmud Torah. By 1900, when Grandma was 10, most of the Jewish children attended the State elementary school, which provided four years of study for boys, and the State gymnasia, where Jews were limited to 5%. An elementary school for girls, which was the extent of Grandma's formal schooling, was opened through the efforts and donations of the Jewish women of Rezhitsa. The language of instruction in the State schools was Russian. By 1914, eight years after Grandma had left Rezhitsa, there were 11,000 Jews in the town, making up 50% of the total population.

Until 1900 most of the Jews of Rezhitsa were either merchants, mainly in flax and agricultural produce trades, or general tradesmen. Many in this latter group were tailors. The Russian census-takers categorized Jewish tradesmen as "petty bourgeois," meaning lower middle class, to differentiate them from the merchants, nobility, clergy, peasants (no Jews allowed in these classes), and intellectuals not belonging to the gentry—teachers, doctors, and students, all university graduates. The lower middle class paid taxes and were recruited for the army, from which merchants were exempt. Grandma's father, Aaron Sholom Gordin, was a drayman (driver of horse and cart)-for-hire, so that, like most of his sons, was listed as a "petty bourgeois."

In 1872, Eugene Schuyler, an American chargé d'affaires at the U.S. legation in St. Petersburg, sent a report to the U.S. Secretary of State, Hamilton Fish, on "The Legal Position of the Hebrews in Russia." This report gives a detailed picture of the political environment in which Grandma's family was living and argues that a more just system should be put in place to integrate Jews into the population rather than isolating them.

"The disabilities and exceptional position of the Israelites in Russia are based, not on religious intolerance, but on the idea that the

Hebrew race 'has a natural tendency to exploit the population in the midst of which it is settled'," the author begins. He summarizes the situation of the Jews in Russia as being members of an "alien race" that owes allegiance to the czar and is subject to all of the burdens but few of the privileges of Russian subjects. On the assumption that they are harmful to the population at large, Jews were under special government supervision and were restricted in where they could live, in what occupations they could pursue, and in acquisition of property, mode of life, dress, education and manner of worship.

These regulations directly affected the mode of existence of Grandma and her family, and their attitude toward their native land. Of the 2,348,000 Jews in the Russian Empire in 1872 (3.06 % of the total population), 9-13 % were crowded into the western provinces, which kept them in poverty with little chance for improvement. For example, the many tailors in her family were kept to a minimal existence because they were among 15 or 20 other tailors in a small town that really needed only three or four. In 1835 when the Russian government experimented with inducing Jews to become farmers, they claimed that the Jews' general disposition was for "petty trade" rather than laboring on the land, although it was only the poorest, least experienced Jews who accepted the offer, and many died from lack of government assistance.

Recruitment in the army was pressed most severely against the Jews, many of them taken into the army when very young, some not returning to their families until 20 years later, and some, never returning. No Jews could become officers. In all self-governing, local institutions—like trade organizations, municipal agencies, town governments—non-Christians could constitute only 1/3 and no Jew could be chosen as mayor. Taxation was doubly or triply heavy on the Jews, on butchering kosher meat and its sale, on Sabbath candles, on manufactured goods, on estates and on the wearing of traditional clothing and hair styles. The taxes fell, in turn, on the peasantry who had to pay the higher prices asked for the goods they wanted to buy. Therefore, Schuyler argues, the so-called harm and exploitation that Jewish merchants imposed on the Russian peasantry actually arose from the law itself.

The list of restrictions on religious rights of Jews is blatantly unjust and self-defeating for the Russian government, the author continues. Marriage between Jews and Orthodox or Roman Catholic Russians was forbidden. Protestants or Lutherans could marry Jews but the Jewish spouse had to give written promise to educate the children as Christians. "It is plain," he continues, "that any antipathy of the common people toward the Hebrew cannot be eradicated so long as the government itself marks them out as a peculiar people with whom marriage is illegal." This alienization of Jews was apparent in the regulation that synagogues could be built no nearer than 700 feet from any church, and on a larger scale, in the effect of Russian ultra-nationalist movements that provoked medieval sentiments of attacking Jews. The historical basis for restricting Jews so severely is the old Polish laws that forbade peasants to engage in trade. The Jews, cut off from farming and the professions, thus monopolized trade and fell into the position of being the go-betweens for the upper and lower classes, making their profit from each and constantly stirring resentment. But the large majority of Jews existed under "a lack of settled residence, constant change and vagrancy, lamentable sanitary conditions, a great mortality, a lowering of morality, a want of means, and an insignificant amount of profits and money saved."

Schuyler concludes: "In spite of the recent reforms, the condition of the Hebrews in Russia, massed together in the western provinces . . . is growing worse and worse." The fault lies in the laws that places them in a position to be ruined. Despite the attempts at liberalization in the Russian legislation of the time, Schuyler considers it impossible to construct one Russian nation while laws existed that made Jews a separate body and that cast slurs on them. This made them "shut themselves out still more and resist

all attempts to draw them into normal relations with the rest of the body politic."

Whether Schuyler was right that liberalizing legislation would have integrated the Jews into the population and made a stronger country, this was not the direction that Russian history took. By the time Grandpa (whose family rented part of Grandma's family house in Rezhitsa) emigrated to America in 1908, and then persuaded Grandma to follow him in 1911 as his bride, life in Rezhitsa for young, enterprising Jews was at a dead end. The empire was falling apart, which always put barely tolerated minorities in an especially precarious position. For Russian Jews, international socialism was one attractive alternative to empire and Zionism was another. Grandpa was persuaded by the first and took it with him to the United States, where he continued working in the labor movement for the next 40 years.

Grandma and Grandpa came to America in a wave of Jewish immigrants, between 1881 and 1914, that reached almost two million—the large majority from eastern Europe. Irving Howe, in World of Our Fathers, characterizes this wave succinctly. Compared to other national groups, the Jewish migration was more a movement of families, showed more determination to settle permanently, and contained a higher proportion of skilled workers than any other group—the intellectuals and skilled workers increasing in number as the period progressed into the twentieth century.

Some were in mass flight from disaster and oppression in Russia, like the 1881 pogroms and the 1903 Kishinev massacre; some, especially the young, chose to leave because they were restless, frustrated by the constriction of their lives and stimulated by a Yiddish cultural renaissance; some left out of strong religious or political conviction, like the Zionists or some Bundists who fled after the failure of the 1905 Revolution. But the vast majority, Howe continues, responded to the "urgencies of their experience. . .not only the displaced and declassed but increasingly the energetic, the vigorous, the ambitious. . . .A whole people was in flight."

After World War I and the Russian Revolution of 1918, while Grandma was establishing herself and her family as new American citizens, Rezhitsa became Rezekne, now a small town in the eastern section of the renewed nation of Latvia. For a while, the Jews of Latvia were part of a fledgling democracy that gave Jews minority status and access to the legislative system. But by the 1930s, totalitarianism in Germany, the Soviet Union, and Italy dominated the political climate of Europe. Three months before Grandma traveled back to Latvia in 1934 to visit her family, there was the Ulmanist coup in Latvia that began to establish anti-Semitic measures similar to those Hitler was setting up in Germany.

In Grandma's journal written during that visit, there is no mention of the coup, or anxiety about the fate of Jews in Latvia. But Sima, her niece by marriage, remembers Grandma's remarking to her family that she didn't want to return home through Berlin because she could see, from the train carrying her to Latvia, boarded up shop windows with the letters "JUDEN" painted across them. It was about a year later, Sima also remembers, that Latvian Jews began agreeing among themselves that they were not going to speak German any longer.

World War II and the Holocaust claimed most of Grandma's family who remained in Latvia. The Jewish Museum in Riga documents the story. In the summer of 1940, following the German-Soviet pact, the Soviet army entered Latvia and installed a government. In mid-June 1941, after the German attack on the U.S.S.R. and imminent occupation of Latvia, Jewish property owners and officials of non-Communist organizations in Latvia, together with their families, were banished by the Soviets to Siberia. This group included some of Grandma's nieces and nephews.

On July 3, 1941, German forces occupied Rezekne. All Jewish men ages 18 to 60 were ordered to report to the market place. About 1,400 were released, about 50 were killed on the spot, and the remainder were locked in prison and then some shot to death while others were ordered to bury them. Some Jewish tradesmen were taken to forced labor camps.

The destruction of Rezekne began the second week of July. In seven days members of the auxiliary Latvian police killed over 140 Jewish men. At the end of July, Rabbi Lubocki was ordered to appear at Gestapo headquarters but instead, he went to the Jewish cemetery where he met with some of his congregants and encouraged them to be strong. They were all shot to death, including one young man who killed three Latvians before he died.

According to one version, the Jews who were left were taken to the Daugavpils (formerly Dvinsk) ghetto and most died there, the remaining transferred to the Kaiserwald Concentration Camp near Riga. According to another version, the remaining Jews were murdered at the Rezekne Jewish cemetery and at one of the old rifle ranges in the Anchupani Mountains, about 5 kms away. The final action was carried out on August 23, 1941. A group of 12 Jews who had converted to Christianity were discovered and also murdered. Those who worked for the Germans were destroyed in 1943.

In the summer of 1944, before their withdrawal, the Germans took a group of Jews from the Riga ghetto and ordered them to dig up the bodies of those who had been murdered and burn them. Then these Jews, in turn, were also murdered. In the town of Rezekne, two Jewish adults and several children were saved by going into hiding with local residents. Rezekne was liberated by the Soviet army on July 7, 1944.

Grandma's brothers Tsalel and Hendel and their wives must have perished either in mass roundups in Rezekne or in one of the ghettos. The only direct evidence we have of Tsalel's death is the testimony of his son Laib, given to Yad Vashem in Israel in 1987. Laib also reported to Yad Vashem that his wife and child had died in the Riga ghetto. We have no evidence for what happened to Tsalel's daughter, Judith, one of Grandma's favorite nieces who was a vivacious companion during Grandma's visit in 1934. Hendel's son Aaron and his daughter Doba are unaccounted for. Hendel's sons Rachmiel and Josef, and his grandson Boris were killed as soldiers in the Soviet army, after escaping into the USSR with their families right before the Nazi invasion of Latvia. Sima, Rachmiel's wife, remembers that on the day before the Nazis arrived, she pushed her children, Rachmiel, his brother Josef and her own brother onto a truck bound for the train that would take them to the village of Ochora, in the USSR. Bella, Sima's daughter, who was eight at the time, remembers a Latvian friend shouting "Fire!" to create mayhem so that her father and uncles, who had been barred from the truck by the authorities, would not be discovered.

Grandma's sister Chaya, her husband Isser and their daughter Bronya all died in the Riga ghetto. Isser and Chaya had lived well in Riga before the war, according to Sima. They owned a large clothing store and four or five dachas. Their sons Avram and Lova (Laib) died as soldiers in the Soviet army. Sima remembers getting a letter from Avram, saying that she should claim his salary. Sima wrote back: "I don't need this. You'll need it when you come home after the war." She heard no more from him and then got news that he was fatally wounded near Seltso village. Laib was shot as an undercover agent after parachuting into Latvia behind the lines. A Latvian woman reported seeing a piece of his buried parachute, which led to his capture and execution.

Chaya's oldest son, Aaron, survived the Riga ghetto but lost his wife and son there. He married Sima after the war and they emigrated to Israel in 1972, taking Sima's son Michael. Sima remembers that after she returned to Riga from the U.S.S.R. at the

end of the war, with her children and her sister Sonia, she met Aaron at a friend's house. He had survived the Riga ghetto and after explaining that he had nowhere to go, started to cry. Sima told him, "Don't cry. You come home with me. When you get a job, give me your word you won't take another room. You stay in my living room." A few days later they took a walk to a nearby church to listen to the music. The next day, as Aaron was going to register for his ID document, he asked her, "Did you like our walk and music yesterday?" Sima answered, "Yes, I was happy." "So be happy all the rest of your life with me, you and your children." When Sima added, "Maybe we'll have more children," he answered, "No, not more children." Aaron died in Israel in 1974.

Sima's daughter Bella married in Riga and she and her husband and son emigrated to the States in 1980, preceded by her brother Michael. Sima followed in 1987 and all are now U.S. citizens living on the West Coast. Grandma's youngest brother Samuel had moved to St. Petersburg (Leningrad) around 1905 and established his family there. His granddaughter Mira still lives there, as does her son David. When Grandma visited Samuel in Leningrad during her 1934 trip, the Stalinist system was heavily in place but she wrote nothing in her journal about the political climate. She took a lot of positive-sounding, tourist notes—statistics about the number of people and working conditions in the factories, the health care and child care systems—and was enthusiastic about the art museums and historical spots. She also mentioned having dinner with an Aunt Sonia there, but no one in the family can presently identify who that would have been.

Grandma wrote that Samuel appeared very thin and ill. Sima remembers that when Grandma returned to Riga from Leningrad, she said to her family, "All the old buildings and people there are crying. They're all crying. I'm happy to be back in Latvia." Sima also reported to the family, years later, that because of Grandma's visit to Samuel, he was put under house arrest for two years afterwards. No one ever told Grandma.

Besides family now living in the States, there were two other branches established outside of Europe—in Canada and in South Africa. The children of Grandma's paternal uncle, Israel/Laib, moved to Canada and established themselves mainly in Montreal, with some members living in the U.S. Grandma's niece, Leah, Hendel's daughter, emigrated to South Africa before World War II and established a family in Cape Town. One of Leah's granddaughters now lives in Ohio with her husband. There is even a connection between the Canadian and South African branches: Israel/Laib's daughter Chia married her tutor and emigrated to Natal, South Africa, perhaps in the same period as her cousin Hendel's daughter Leah went there.

Descendants of: Reb Hendel GORDIN

1 **Reb Hendel GORDIN**
m. **Fruma ?**
Fruma:
Husband, Reb Hendel GORDIN, was a melamed (scholar). After he died, Fruma baked bread to support six children. Fruma became blind and her oldest son Aaron took her into his home.
2 **Aaron Sholom GORDIN** b. _____ d. 1906 St.Petersburg,Preobrazhenskoye cemetery
m. **Brocha Liebeh CAHAN** d. ca. 1918 Riga
On list of Latvian Jewish donors for victims of tragedies and to build Israel, printed in HaMelitz, Hebrew Newspaper: Shlomo Gordon, brother of Yehudah Laib Gordon, Daugavpils (part of Rezekne district), Latvia, 1895, 1898, 1900. Became breadwinner of family at age 13, after his father, Reb Hendel GORDIN, died. Became a balegola (a driver of horse and cart-for hire).
Brocha:
Was from Sibezh, Vitebsk. Her mother insisted that she marry Aaron Sholom GORDIN because his father and brother were scholars, despite the fact that Brocha Liebeh objected.
3 **Hendel GORDIN**
m. **Sara Freida**
Always supported the family and took in his grandmother Fruma. He loved horses. Had a horse and cart.
4 **Leah GORDIN** b. _____ d. SouthAfrica
m. **? SCHUMACHER**
5 **Liba/Lily SCHUMACHER** b. SouthAfrica
m. **Sid KRISEMAN**
6 **Janet KRISEMAN**
m. **? KANTOR**
6 **Hilary KRISEMAN**
5 **Jenny SCHUMACHER**
5 **Yetty SCHUMACHER**
6 **Linda**
4 **Abram/Girsh GORDIN** b. 28 Nov 1898 Rezekne
m. **?**
5 **Boris GORDIN** b. _____ d. soldier, WWII
5 **Zhameh (Zachar) GORDIN** b. 1928
m. **Anna ?**
from Leningrad to San Francisco
4 **Josef GORDIN** b. _____ d. soldier,WWII
m. **Sonya FISH** [father:Mendel] d. 1948 cancer, in Riga
5 **Alexandra GORDIN** b. _____ d. Before WWII
5 **Mendel "Mischa" GORDIN**
m. **Ella ?**
6 **Jana GORDIN (twin)**

6 **Sora GORDIN (twin)**
6 **? GORDIN** b. _____ d. 1994
5 **? GORDIN** b. _____ d. At one year Russia
4 **Rachmiel GORDIN** b. _____ d. WWII,soldier in Soviet army
m. **Sima FISH** m. 1930's Riga? b. 1 Mar 1911 Parents: Mendel FISH and Hana MEL
122nd rifle regiment, 201st rifle div.; Missing in Action on nw front beyond Staraya Russa, near village of Rolubov, Aug. 13, 1942
Sima:
Sima married two GORDIN cousins: Rachmiel GORDIN before WWII, and Aaron SHNEER after the war. Her sister Sonya married Rachmiel's brother, Josef. Sima's father: Mendel FISH; her mother: Hana MEL. Her mother's siblings were: Hirsh MEL; Abram MEL; Yudel MEL. Sima worked as a designer/dressmaker in Levin Clothing Store, Riga. She had two brothers; one left Latvia for the USSR in June 1941, with Sima and Rachmiel.
5 **Michael (Mendel) GORDIN** b. Aug. 1937
m. **Eleanor ?**
5 **Bella GORDIN** b. 3 Mar 1933 Riga
m. **Itzack RABINOVICH**
Live in San Francisco
6 **Isser RABINOVICH**
m. **Irina KLETSER**
7 **Eli RABINOVICH**
7 **Rachalle RABINOVICH**
4 **Aaron GORDIN**
m. **?**
5 **? GORDIN**
5 **? GORDIN**
4 **Doba/Slava Miriam GORDIN** b. Jul 1899(1904?) Rezekne
m. **Abram GEFSHTAYN (GEPSTEIN)** b. July 20, 1896 Rezekne
(See message listed with husband.)
Abram:
The State marriage registry in Riga lists Abram Aba GEPSTEIN, born July 20, 1896 as marrying Slava GORDIN, born 1904, on Dec. 27, 1933. This seems to be the same Doba/Slava GORDIN, Hendel's daughter, who sent Sylvia Berman a photo of herself and her son, Isinke (Isaac), with their last name signed GEFSHTAYN, although Doba/Slava's birthdate is listed elsewhere as 1899, not 1904.
5 **Isaac GEFSHTAYN**
3 **Tsalel GORDIN** b. 19 Nov 1878 Rezekne d. in WWII
m. **Pesa Sipa**
m. **Sara Kaca** b. 5 Jun 1891
4 **Hendel GORDIN** b. 23 May 1917
5 **(Daughter)**
In Haifa.

5 **(Son)**
In Riga.
4 **Aaron Shlomo GORDIN** b. 1909 d. 6 Aug 1911 at 1 1/2 years
4 **Laib GORDIN**
m. **Sara LIVSHITS** b. 1916 Rezekne d. 1941 Riga ghetto
Gave Yad Vashem information on his father on 9/27/89. Laib 's address in Riga: Rudens St.10-148
5 **Matl GORDIN** b. 1940 d. 1941 Riga ghetto
4 **Judith GORDIN** b. March 1,1909
4 **Gershon GORDIN**
4 **Brocha Liba GORDIN** b. 25 Aug 1934 d. 9 Jan 1935 meningitis
3 **Chaya Slava GORDIN** b. ca. 1885 Rezekne d. WWII Riga ghetto
m. **Isser (Israel) SHNEER** b. Rezekne d. WWII Riga ghetto
Took in her mother Brocha Liebeh to live with her and family in Riga.
Isser:
Father: Nohima SHNEER
4 **Avram SHNEER** b. 1915 d. 25 Dec 1942 Soviet army, co.comdr, wounded, Seltso
4 **Lova (Laib) SHNEER** b. 9 Aug 1917 Rezekne d. WWII Soviet Army,shot as undercover agent
4 **Bronya (Fruma) SHNEER** b. 12 Jun 1911 Rezekne d. WWII Riga ghetto
4 **Sora SHNEER** b. 1909
4 **Aaron SHNEER** b. 28 Aug. 1907 Rezekne d. 1974 Israel
m. **?** d. in Riga ghetto
m. **Sima FISH** b. 1 Mar 1911 Parents: Mendel FISH and Hana MEL
Sima:
Sima FISH married two cousins: Rachmiel GORDIN before WWII, and Aaron Shneer after WWII. Her sister Sonya FISH married Rachmiel's brother Josef GORDIN.
Sima's father: Mendel FISH; her mother: Hana MEL. Her mother's siblings: Hirsh MEL; Abram MEL; Yudel MEL.
Sima worked as a designer/dressmaker in Levin Clothing Store, Riga.
Besides her sister, Sonya, Sima had two brothers; one left Latvia for the USSR, with Sima and Rachmiel, in June 1941.
5 **?** b. _____ d. in Riga ghetto
3 **Shmuel (Samuel) GORDIN** b. ca. 1888 Rezekne
m. **Rose ?**
4 **Fenya GORDIN**
m. **David BODIN**
5 **Marek BODIN**
5 **Mira DAVIDOVNA BODIN** b. ca. 1933
m. **Nahum STRASFOGEL**
Izmailovsky Prospekt,House7,#94,St.Pet.,Russia. Phone:24.04.33 251-2327
6 **David STRASFOGEL**
4 **Aaron GORDIN**
m. **Genia ?**
5 **(Son) GORDIN**

3 **Tsiveh (Sylvia) GORDIN** b. 16 Mar 1890 Rezekne, Latvia d. 24 Feb 1980 Altoona, PA
m. **Avram (Abe) (BUCHMUZ) BERMAN** b. 17 May 1889 Rezekne d. June 16, 1952 Altoona, PA
[son of Yaacov (Jacob) BUCHMUZ and Ettle (Ethel) METTER]
Avram:
Emigrated to the U.S. in 1907 with brother Harry. They were preceded by sister Lena. Abe's father Yaacov had a first wife who died. They had one son, a revolutionary, who committed suicide. His mother Ethel's father was a carpenter. Ethel's sister married EDELMAN and their son became a librarian in Copenhagen. The EDELMANs all got typhus during an epidemic. Their father pulled them through, then got sick and died of the disease. Abe sponsored the emigration to the US of Frieda and Izzy NAGLE, who was his first cousin.
4 **Emma BERMAN** b. Jan. 19, 1913 Houtzdale,PA
m. **Hillis COHN** m. January 1938 Altoona, PA b. March 13, 1906 d. 2 Nov 2000 Marblehead,MA
[son of Ruben COHN and Tela KLAIMAN]
5 **Tela COHN** b. Dec. 15, 1938 Altoona, PA
m. **Joseph ZASLOFF** m. May 3, 1964 Altoona, PA b. Feb.24, 1925
6 **Anne ZASLOFF** b. Dec.29, 1968
m. **Michael ADLER**
7 **Eytan ADLER** b. May 7, 1998
7 **Noah ADLER** b. 14 Jul 2000
6 **Eva ZASLOFF** b. April 3, 1971
m. **Henry KANDEL**
7 **Benjamin KANDEL-ZASLOFF** b. Aug.15, 1999
7 **Shayna KANDEL-ZASLOFF** b. March 20, 2002
6 **Beth ZASLOFF** b. April 6, 1973
m. **Joshua STECKEL**
6 **Karen ZASLOFF** b. Sept.16, 1974
5 **Burton "Buzzy" COHN** b. May 17, 1940 Altoona,PA
m. **Miriam PRIZENT**
6 **Laura COHN**
m. **Peter SPEIGEL**
6 **Rachel COHN**
6 **Sheila COHN**
5 **Howard COHN** b. Sept.18, 1946 Altoona,PA
m. **Nicole NAKACHE**
6 **Natalie COHN**
m. **Roei DAVIDSON**
6 **Stephanie COHN**
6 **Sylvia COHN**
5 **Marilyn COHN** b. Sept.29, 1949 Altoona,PA
m. **Larry POSNER**
6 **Joseph POSNER**
6 **Rebecca POSNER**
6 **Elana POSNER**

4 **Florence BERMAN** b. 27 Nov 1914 20th Ave.,Altoona,PA d. 30 Oct 1994 Pittsburgh, PA
m. **Reuben "Ruby" KARP**
5 **Norman KARP**
m. **Nancy FRIEDMAN**
6 **Susan KARP**
m. **Oren SAGHER**
7 **Ethan SAGHER**
7 **Abigail SAGHER**
7 **Daniel SAGHER**
6 **Michael KARP**
m. **Sandi "Gigi" GILLISPIE**
7 **Avi KARP**
7 **Zachary KARP**
7 **AriElle KARP**
6 **Jordan KARP (and Paul BOWDEN)**
5 **Diane "Danni" KARP**
m. **Irving BLOOM**
m. **Walter RUDOV**
6 **Cara BLOOM**
m. **Richard CARUFEL**
6 **Joel BLOOM**
6 **Ellen BLOOM**
m. **Basar PARLAKER**
6 **Steven BLOOM**
5 **Elissa KARP**
m. **Charles "Chas" HIRSH**
6 **Erin HIRSH**
m. **Ezra SHERMAN**
6 **Amanda HIRSH**
4 **Belle BERMAN** b. 11 Oct 1917 24th St.,Altoona,PA
m. **Egon GARTENBERG**
5 **Valerie GARTENBERG**
m. **Ray BRYANT**
5 **Vickie GARTENBERG**
m. **David GINSBERG**
6 **Sara GINSBERG**
6 **Ellie GINSBERG**
5 **Andrew "Andy" GARTENBERG**
m. **Linda BOSWELL**
m. **Catherine DERBYSHIRE**
6 **Aaron GARTENBERG**
4 **Arnold BERMAN** b. 31 Aug 1919 1471 Wash.Ave.,Altoona, PA d. 29 Apr 1993
m. **Selma SLONIMSKY**
5 **Steve BERMAN**

5 **Joel BERMAN**
m. **Kathy McCOY**
m. **Mary DWYER**
6 **Laura BERMAN**
6 **Julie BERMAN**
6 **Cory BERMAN**
5 **Debbie BERMAN**
5 **Alan BERMAN**
m. **Debbie ZIEGAS**
6 **Jeremy BERMAN**
6 **Brett BERMAN**
6 **Alexa BERMAN**
Daughter, adopted from Russia
4 **Birdie (Brocha Liebeh) BERMAN** b. 25 Jan 1928 3411 Oneida Ave.,Altoona,PA
m. **Arnold SCHULMAN**
5 **David SCHULMAN**
m. **Rachel ADLER**
6 **Amitai "Ami" ADLER**
5 **Avi SCHULMAN**
m. **Eve BEN-ORA**
6 **Naomi SCHULMAN**
6 **Carmiel SCHULMAN**
6 **Rebecca SCHULMAN**
5 **Marty SCHULMAN**
m. **Tarra BREITE**
6 **Chelsea SCHULMAN**
6 **Noah SCHULMAN**
6 **Danya SCHULMAN**
5 **Jay SCHULMAN**
m. **Lisa PAVLOVSKY**
6 **Adam PAVLOVSKY SCHULMAN**
3 **Alexander GORDIN** [LatviaNatlArchi] b. 1 Nov 1895 Rezekne
2 **Israel/Laib GORDIN**
m. **Gessa Feiga (father: Lippa)**
On list of Latvian Jewish donors for victims of tragedies and to build Israel, printed in HaMelitz, Hebrew newspaper: Yehuda Laib Gordon, brother of Shlomo Gordon, Daugavpils (part of Rezekne district), 1895.
3 **Chaya GORDIN**
m. **her tutor**
4 **Six children**
3 **Bluma GORDIN**
3 **Lippa GORDIN**
Settled in Canada, Montreal area
4 **Annie GORDIN**
m. **Ben KATLER**

5 **Julian KATLER**
5 **Michael KATLER**
4 **Harry GORDIN**
4 **Fannie GORDIN**
4 **David GORDIN**
5 **Richard GORDIN**
4 **Willie/Bill GORDIN**
3 **Tanya GORDIN**
3 **Mayer/Gershon GORDIN** b. Nov.1, 1892 Rezekne
4 **two children**
3 **Golda GORDIN**
3 **Sophie/Slova GORDIN** b. Riga
m. **Chaim WOLOSHIN**
4 **Evelyn WOLOSHIN**
5 **five children**
4 **Issie WOLOSHIN**
5 **three children**
4 **Bennie WOLOSHIN/WALLACE**
4 **Ann WOLOSHIN** b. _____ d. 2002
m. **? SHIFFMAN**
Shiffman family lives in California
5 **Earl SHIFFMAN**
5 **Ruby SHIFFMAN**
m. **? DIAMOND**
5 **Gloria SHIFFMAN**
m. **? KLEIN**
5 **Hal SHIFFMAN**
m. **Beryl ?**
2 **Faivish GORDIN** b. 1854
m. **Itka WALD** m. 29 Nov 1878 Rezekne b. 1856
2 **Child4 GORDIN**
2 **Child5 GORDIN**
2 **Child6 GORDIN**

Sylvia Berman Remembers

Sylvia Berman remembers

[from audio taped interviews, with grandchildren Debbie Berman, Joel and Allan Berman, Howard and Marilyn Cohn, and David Schulman in 1972, and with Avi and David Schulman in 1977]

Tsiveh Gordin

I was born in an eastern—let's say, a poor city. It was 11,000 Jews and 6,000 non-Jews. They call it now Rezekne, but under the Russians, it was Rezhitsa. So I am a Russian. That's the only way I know, because the Russian culture, the Russian books, the Russian theater— But Jews were different. You had to go to *cheder*, to a Jewish school. First you're a Jew, and then you're a Russian. But it's interesting that way.

How I met Pop? Now that's silly—I never met him! I grew up with him. He was there, he was always there. We were kids together. He's only 10 months older than I am. I remember, they would always be in our house, and I don't know why. They lived in another part of our house. They were poorer. They never paid the rent. They would gather in the evening, the children would gather in our house. Like in the winter nights, it gets dark so early. And the boys would come from *cheder*, at 9 o'clock in the evening. So all Papa's family would gather in our house, and there is where they talked, and they fought, and they disagreed.

My family, of my age, there were very few because my sister was four years older than I was, and then they were higher and higher. See, when my oldest brother got married, I was only five or six years old, though I remember. But there were other kids of our age around, neighbors, maybe one or two.

So, talking about Pop, he was there all the time, when he went to *cheder*. Then he went to learn the trade of watch making for five years and I didn't see him and I didn't know even where he was. He was 12, he was a bar mitzvah in Russia, near Leningrad. It used to be called the Czar's Village. Now they call it Children's Village, right near Leningrad. So, he went away and had got his diploma as a watchmaker—he served five years for it. Maybe I told you that. He had to learn how to open a watch and how to put it together in front of judges. And if not, you can't get a diploma. It was a very tough thing. He served with a master, he nursed their children, he went errands, he got beaten up by the seniors— He was a little boy and they didn't give him enough to eat.

You don't know your grandpa. He was at David's *bris*, that's all.

After he got his diploma—You see, this was the time that the Jewish people were not allowed to live in Russia every place they wanted to. They had to live within the Pale—that was a certain territory that Jews could live, although there were big cities like Odessa that was Jewish, they could live there. It was a big city, very cultural. But—St. Petersburg and Moscow and Riga—you couldn't live there unless you had a diploma or you could be a professor. A tailor, you would have to hold an examination, and then you could live there. So, he was away for five years.

Then when he came back to Rhezitsa, to our town where we were born, he was 16 and I was 15. Or he was 17 and I was 16. So we met and we sort of fell in love. Well, puppy love—what's the difference. And he was already on his way to the States. You see, there was no future for a Jewish family. What to do? They could have gone to live some place else because Pop's father served in the army, I don't know, for many years, and he had rights. But he wouldn't go to the States. He was not aggressive, he didn't want to go. He was a tailor and he was very proud that he was a soldier.

Jacov Buchmuz was his name. In Yiddish they used to call him Yankel. They came from a little village near us called Buchmuza. I was never there and I don't know where. That's how they got their name. So Pop's sister Lena decided that she will go to the States, and make a future for everybody. So she had made Pop—Grandpa—leave everything go. He was a very, very good watchmaker. He was a skillful man anyway. Whatever it took to do, it was perfect, it was good. So he departed. I never heard from him, and that was my first love. Lena sent for him. You know, they used to do in those years—that's the old immigrants, came over here and they became successful here. Lena sent steamship tickets—there were no planes in those years—for him, Abe, and for Harry, a brother, three or four years younger, I don't remember. He wasn't married. He got killed, you know, in Philadelphia. He was going to be married, but he was killed by an automobile. It came up on the curb.

Pop and Harry sailed from Libava, a little province near Riga. Now the thing is this. Lena sent tickets for Pop, for Grandpa, and for his brother. She had to borrow. At that time there were peddlers. They used to peddle tickets. You got the tickets on installment—they made a dollar a month there—and then the immigrants came and they went to work and paid off the rest.

Lena was a young girl. She came alone to the States with a girlfriend. And both of them came in late at night and at that time they didn't ask no questions, the immigrant authorities. They just let them go, the more the merrier. She came into Philadelphia. They both must have been 17 or 19, something like that, and they didn't even have an address where to come. So they saw light in some store, they walked in—it was tobacco store. So the fellow understood that they're immigrants and he spoke Yiddish. So he told them, "Girls, you shouldn't go at night so late!" Anyway, he let know the HIAS—Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, they've been in existence for years.

So this is how they got here, and then there were *landslite* [people from their same home area] and they took care of them, and societies took care of them. So that's how they got to work in the shops. Harry was a barber—they made him a barber because they thought a barber can make a living. I'm telling you a lot of things that's maybe not even interesting.

When Pop left for the USA, I didn't hear from him for four years. I was in Riga a couple of years, and I worked in one of the stores. So then it happened that he went to a gathering of *landslite* and met people that knew me. They also were neighbors—but they went before. So they told him where I am and Grandpa started to write to me. And in three months I got a *shift-carte*, a boat ticket, and I came to the States to marry Papa.

I had nobody special at that time. I knew a lot of boys, but I didn't know them well. I mean, I didn't . . . When I came, I was 21, almost 22. It was 1911. People did marry young back then, but I didn't. And 21 was not so old. Papa was already 22! He was 23 when Emma was born. I was 22. It sort of happened like that.

I sailed—I was in Riga before I left, with my sister. I was in Rezhitsa for a whole summer and then I came to Riga and stayed about a month. I went from Libava to Hull, a city in England. From there I went to London. I'll never forget when I came to London, I was bewildered. I was dressed very well. I had a nice black suit on and had a nice little hat on. When other people came, they were so—they looked like hoodlums. Do you know why? Because people used to say, "Dress in rags. Because you wouldn't wear them here in America anyway. Leave everything at home for somebody that needs it." So that's what people did. I left a muff, a fur muff, and a fur neckpiece. I left it for a girlfriend of mine because they said you wouldn't wear it here, so I didn't take it. But I looked very well in that black suit and I came to the States, and there is where I met Pop.

Returning in 1934

I landed in Hamburg when I took a visit back to Latvia in 1934. I came from Le Havre into Hamburg, Germany, where Hitler was in power only a year. From there, I got off, and took the train to Riga. On the way, we passed Lithuania. That's why I had to have four visas. We passed through all this. Then, by train, I came to Latvia. I don't remember how long it took.

In 1934, things had changed. Our town of Rezekne was already sort of shot. There were, maybe, 12,000 people and the Jewish people all left. There was only a few old men. The youngsters all went away. Anybody who can get out went to the big cities. They were all in Riga. Some people had settled in Moscow a lot. It used to be, you weren't allowed to be in Moscow, years ago. But after the Revolution, you could go to Moscow. Who in the world would have dreamt that it will be so bad? When I was there, it was very interesting because from Latvia, to go to Leningrad, that meant you had to have a visa and a passport check. It was already different, two different countries.

When I came to Riga, I saw a lot of people that had lived in our town. See, they all went to the big cities, as much as they could. The government had built some hospitals, which we didn't have it before. They had built some schools, which we didn't have it. But the Jewish people still didn't have no entry. See, the Latvians were anti-Semites. They were oppressed for so long, and yet, when they became independent, they oppressed the Jews just the same. That's the way it is. Like they say, when the English people came to America, they came here because they were oppressed. Then they oppressed the other people.

Sylvia Berman, immigrant

Getting married

When I came here, I was in Philadelphia three months with the whole family—Lena and Edith— They weren't married. Papa was the second one, Lena was the oldest. And Jacov came as a Buchmuz, but he changed his name. And I'll tell you how he changed. Lena worked in a shop, in a shirt factory, and some fellow was sort of sweet on her. So the fellow workers named her—his name was Berman. They used to call her Mrs. Berman. It used to kill her, that they called her that. So when Pop came in, so they said, "Ahh, Berman's brother is here!" So the family thought, "Berman", that's pretty good, so they'll take it.

Jacov was here twice. Didn't like it. He went back, not because he was religious. I think he was very—he couldn't acclimatize himself. You see, a father in Europe is a king. And here he was nothing. The kids made the living. Now, do you know that at our table, we weren't rich or stylish or anything, but the table was set nice. And we would never touch anything before the father ate, before he started. I mean, the respect of the father. He missed it. And beside this, he couldn't make a living. So then, Papa tried to make him a business man. He used to sell pretzels in Gimbels, in the door. They did a lot of things, these immigrants, after all, to make a living. But that's what happens to all the fathers, that they became nothing in America. Because the children were the breadwinners, and they were it!

Now, so Pop came here and we got married. And we went to live in Houtzdale. Houtzdale, there is a place with flies and with cows, the whole population was very funny. I'll tell you why Houtzdale. At that time he was already a good watchmaker and he had a good job, and he could decorate windows. He could do a lot of things, I mean, Pop could do a lot of things that you wouldn't expect

him to. So, the reason why we went to Houtzdale, he asked the salesmen there, the wholesalers, if they know of a place where he can go, in a small town because I am coming, and get married. And he must live in a small town where he can live very thrifty, and he must save up a few dollars for the future. So that's why we lived in Houtzdale. We got married in Altoona. Altoona's a big city—at that time it was about 100,000, and it's still big but people live on the outskirts now, you know. To me it was big, because I love the big city, I came from Riga. So, but Altoona was very big to me after Houtzdale.

And to get to Altoona, I had to meet Papa in Tyrone. You know Tyrone? So when the train came to Tyrone, I couldn't tell the conductor where I'm going, because I said "Tayrone", and he didn't understand me—that *goyisha kopf*! Papa wrote to me in Yiddish, and in Yiddish, it's spelled "tess" "tsvey yudin" "res" "aleph" "nun". I read it "Tayrone". It was "Ty"rone. They couldn't understand it. They took me all the way to Harrisburg and there was a fella—they looked in my pocketbook and my bag and couldn't find anything to identify where I want to go. Finally, one fella, the conductor, thought it must be Tyrone. I says, "Yes, yes, Tyrone." So he took me back with another train that left me off, finally, in Tyrone. And there the train had to come in from Houtzdale and Papa was supposed to be on it to meet me. So, I asked a fella, "Train? Houtzdale?" So the man already understood. He said, "There it is. Right here." So the train came in and Pop came. And we came to Altoona and we got married.

Getting married—at Phillip Troop's in Altoona—they had herring and some schnaps and some cake. That was our wedding. I wore a black dress. That's the only dress I had and it was a pretty dress, because I brought material and, in Philadelphia, some dressmaker made me a dress. The only thing, there was a little pink piping. But he was so sophisticated that he didn't care for anything—who cares! A black dress is fine. Who would ever, what girl would ever think of getting married in a black dress?! So that's it.

Our first night

The train ride to Houtzdale was something. Oh boy! A little train like you see in the movies. What would you call it? They have, in the old movies, you can see it, the little train. Choo-choo train, but there's a name for it. Well anyway, it's not important. The train ride to Houtzdale—I thought it would shake my guts out. But it was only a few miles.

Then we had dinner at the Luxemburgs. That was the people that Grandpa worked for two years. And the first night in our apartment, that I'll have to tell you. But it wouldn't be so exciting as X-rated. You see a lot more now.

The first night in our apartment was really something—the things that they did. Papa got the apartment and it was three rooms downstairs and two rooms upstairs. So upstairs we didn't do anything, but we bought the furniture—a living room, a kitchen and sort of a dining room, I don't remember already. So what did they do? They hanged the curtains, they helped in the store where he worked. And also the lady for whom he worked. They fixed up the apartment. Everything was beautiful. I walked in, I have a home.

So, then, we had dinner at Mrs. Luxemburg's house. They told me how dinner is served. You know, they serve by passing around. Very formal, to me, anyway. So, we went to bed, and we were just getting cozy—and an alarm clock rings, and we don't know where it is! And the house is dark, and we don't know where the switches are. And the alarm clock kills us! See, they were in the jewelry business and they made an alarm clock ring. Where was the alarm clock? I told you, we had no furniture upstairs. There was a hole where a chimney was supposed to be because there was the hole

for the pipe. There is where they put the alarm clock. All right, so we got rid of the alarm clock.

Then, we go to bed—AND BELLS START TO RING! Cow bells! They tied it to the springs! So that was it, I don't remember exactly what else, but it went on the whole night, something else.

Places where we lived, set up a business, and raised a family

In Houtzdale, I was in a bad fix. To come to a small town, yet, where there were maybe half a dozen Jewish people. But there was Mrs. Luxemburg. You remember her? You wouldn't remember her. Papa went to work for these people, for the Luxemburgs. Let's put it that way. And Mrs. Luxemburg knew a little German, and I spoke Yiddish. So it worked out—you know, German and Yiddish have something in common. So she taught me how to cook, even how to bake bread and bagels. How to do it in a small town, because—In fact, people there were bakers but they didn't do it like Jewish people did. They were German bakers. But it did me good because I had to learn English. That's the way I learned, a little bit here, a little bit there.

We lived in Windber, also—another little hole—for two years. Windber is a mining town and there is where they had stores, Eureka Stores, they called them. They had mines all over. The bosses of the mines had the Eureka Stores. The workers were made to buy in the store, and they were charged plenty. As soon as we got there, we got a store book. Papa was a salesman there. I mean, he took care of a whole department of jewelry. He used to buy and sell. But we had to buy there everything from the store. Now wasn't that something. You work for your money and all you get, they get back.

Then we moved to Altoona. You know how we came to Altoona? That was a friend of ours whom we knew very well in Houtzdale. He was a watchmaker, too. So he had a little store in Altoona. We used to be friendly, so he wrote a letter and told Papa that he's in a bad way. That man already had a wife and three children. So what was the trouble? We thought, he needs money or something. We had saved up $150 dollars. So Pop took that $150 and went to help Mr. Glasser. He says, no, he has to sell the store, because his wife is tubercular. She's from New York and he has to move to New York and sell the store. So Papa had $150 so he bought the store.

It was a little place. Papa thought, he'll work, and then he'll get maybe a little jewelry and something. So he started to work, and then, to find a place to live was murder in those years. You couldn't pay much. So we got a place, one room. It was terrible, there wasn't a toilet even inside. It was on the outside.

Papa went to Philadelphia. He went to the wholesalers. This is the real part of our life, the building, the beginning. This is really, they call it the beginning of—the "whomes vraishis," "in the beginning." So, he went, mind you, to Philadelphia, and he told the wholesalers who he is and what he wants to do. And there was an elderly man there, and he looked at Pop and he patted him on the shoulder. And he says, "My boy, you'll get some goods." And he sent him enough of goods to have a Christmas. That was before Christmas.

Then we got in the store, and we thought, we're in business. But there was a big suspension in the shops. You know, the railroad shops in Altoona? That was the big suspension. You should have learned that in history somewhere. A layoff, because they organized. See, they organized so the whole shop was—they called it a lockout. This was 1913. At that time—it was so funny. There was no industry in Altoona, just the Pennsylvania railroad shops. And when the shops close up, there was no business. And yet the people were so against the workers. And I couldn't understand it. Because

everybody was depending on the wages. And then payday, and it was busy on the avenue. But when there was no payday, then some of the men, like our friend Mr. Pachter, donned a white apron and he swept the streets.

What did Pop think of the lockout? What should he think? He felt that he has no work and he couldn't—what could he think? What would you think? We come and we have one baby, and Florence was on the way already and you can't make a living. So he went to the jewelry stores and he asked them for work. And they paid him a quarter for what they got, a dollar. You see, so that's the way it started. So later on, before Florence was born, the strike was settled, and another strike, the lockout, was settled, and they started to work, and things started to roll. Then Pop bought another store which is already—it was near the Strand Theater. It was a good store. Papa was a skillful man. He had already one girl to work for him, mind you. And things were good.

When Papa bought the Strand Theater store, that was when Belle was born. I didn't work much in the store. I couldn't. I had children. Papa wanted me, but how could I do it, I used to feel foolish. I couldn't talk. It was hard. And besides this, taking care of the children was important, so he gave it up. He wanted me, he started me on work in the store, but I didn't take to it because I couldn't.

Then Papa bought another store, Berman's [no relation] Jewelry Store. That store was good, the jewelry store. It isn't there anymore. Uncle Arnold and Harry built a new, beautiful store later. But, this is the way things went for us.

We had an apartment—Ohh, we got an apartment for ourselves with a toilet inside! Do you think, if I would get a palace, I wouldn't be as happy! I really wanted to hug the toilet before I used that. And we already had a living room, and two bedrooms but we used only one—we had no furniture. And a kitchen. It was an apartment on 19th street. And we were happy here. We lived there for two years and then we moved out to a house—a real house, with an upstairs and downstairs and there is where Belle was born, in that house. So we already had three girls. Now that house we didn't buy, we rented it. Then we bought another house for $3500, and it was a darn nice house [on Washington Avenue]. And there is where Arnold was born, in that house.

The Depression

Then Pop built a house, on Oneida Avenue in Altoona. That was a beautiful home, Allegheny Furnace. (There is where Aunt Emma later built a house, on that same street.) Birdie was born in that big, beautiful home in Allegheny Furnace. But we lost it in the Depression, like anybody else. Because we borrowed money to build it, and it was too much for us anyway. That house that we built—we had a wonderful time. We had a balcony upstairs and I thought the children will dance up there and we had a lot of plans. Then the 1929 Depression came in and the bottom fell out. We lived there for six good years. The children were growing, and they were beautiful and they were good students. And Belle was dancing, and Aunt Emma was playing the piano, Florence played the violin—everything was so beautiful. That house went for $11,000. Six bedrooms, two bathrooms, we cultivated the yard and everything. You know how you finish up. The house still looks as good as when it was new, because the bricks are so beautiful.

So we moved out on Broad Avenue, where another family lost that house, where Florence was married. These people were so bitter, that moved out of the house, that they took the toilet out! That house we rented. Oh, with all the troubles we had! But Florence got married there, with a great big dining room.

And after that, Third Avenue was heaven already. It was really an old house, but it had a lot of charm and was beautiful. You wouldn't remember—

Pop had lost his business and he lost a lot of money. Then they settled it for a small percentage and he bought out his name, and bought his credit back. You see? That was in the Depression—you had it in history, maybe? That was 1929. But when we moved in on Third Avenue, Pop said—after two years he paid for that house—"Nobody's going to chase us out of here. It's ours. We don't owe a penny on it." At that time, we didn't pay much for it—about $6500 or $7000, something like that. In those years, it was a lot of money. But two years later, that's what he did, and he said, "Nobody's going to move us from here."

And we lived there for 28 good years. The children were growing and they had parties and Aunt Emma went to St. Louis. And, of course, Birdie went to college already and Aunt Emma went to school. It's a good thing she only had a two-year course and then she got a job. In those years, she got $55 a week in the college. Pretty good, in those years. Mind you, if they always went by seniority—but they took her, on account she was a good teacher. And she had good personality and everything else that goes with it. So that's the way life went on.

Poppa

And if Poppa would not get sick— He had a heart condition, but that didn't kill him. Cancer did. And he would have lived, and he had so many hobbies that he would never be lonely. He did a lot of reading but you can't read when you get that old. Everything—he went hunting. He had a club, a hunting club. He had all kinds of ammunition in the cellar. And he used to go fishing. He belonged to the Masons—he was a Shriner. And an *arbeiteringer*, that was first. That was also done by the immigrants. That was, first, fraternal, because everybody was lonely, and needed somebody. And there was The Forward. Your grandpa [Schulman] still gets The Forward, I think, but it isn't what it used to be. It isn't, because—it isn't. Well, anyway, your grandpa brought me a lot of Forwards the other day. But I can't read. I can look at it maybe for 15 minutes, but I can't read—my eyes aren't good.

But Grandpa would have enjoyed life to the best. I remember about the way I put my garbage disposal in. Grandpa didn't want a garbage disposal. So I said, before we went to Florida, I said to Arnold, "Put a garbage disposal in, while we're away." If it'll be in, so Grandpa wouldn't say anything. He wouldn't mind. So that's what I arranged. So when I came back, there was a garbage disposal. And I was so tickled with it, and the garbage disposal is working, and I am working at it. And Grandpa don't say anything—not good and not bad—nothing! Then I said, "Mr. Berman, can I introduce you to my garbage disposal?" So he started to laugh. And then he was waiting to see how it works. And, you know, it was new in those years—a long time ago. Almost 25 years ago, they were new. And the plumbers themselves didn't know how to install it right. The garbage disposal didn't work! Just when I wanted to show, the garbage disposal didn't work! So he started to laugh. Then he had it on me that the garbage disposal doesn't work.

He got along good with young people, he always did. He was a likable fellow. He was treasurer of The Altoona Federation of Charities for seven years. They did away with all the smaller societies.

It was funny. In the beginning, he wasn't a Zionist, because he felt that everything should be settled right here, all over the world. I mean, Jewish people should get their rights all over and all this—Like even today, what's going on in Russia. The people there, they call them "Refuseniks." I just read an article in Hadassah Magazine, mind you. They love Russia, they want to live in Russia, but they

want to live their own way. I guess you know better than I do about it, so there's no sense in me telling you this.

What caused him to become a Zionist?—Because the Revolution of 1905 had failed in Russia, you see? And then, here, he was still a Socialist, he was active in the *arbeiter* group because it was our people. And they needed an organization. So he became a Zionist when Israel was born, I think. He didn't believe that Jewish people had to be settled in one place. They could settle things all over the world—but it didn't work. So that was the best—even The Forward, they were never Zionist, but they turned. They were the Labor Zionists.

Papa didn't want to go back to Russia with me in 1934, but when I came back, we were planning that we'll go again. And then he'll come along. But I knew, he was not a good traveler. He couldn't stand a lot of things. I can't tell you how it is. I mean, he was away for so long and it would be hard on him. With me, I had family there, you see. I had brothers, I had a sister. He wanted to go to Leningrad more than any place. He grew up there. That was his youth there. Well, anyway, that's the way it is.

Learning English

How did I learn English? That's another, oh boy, that's a story in itself. Can you picture, kids, you come in a strange world, can't talk English. I used to be jealous of little kids. They talk English, and I can't! And Aunt Emma couldn't talk English until she went outside and played with the children, because I talked Yiddish to her. We went to live in that little town of Houtzdale where Claudia Luxemburg and Mr. Luxemburg were. I came there and you have to learn. So Grandpa sends me to buy some groceries. He writes it in Yiddish. So I bought everything, but I wanted prunes. And I didn't know how to say it. Now, these people there, they were so good, gentile people. A small town. They showed me everything in the grocery store. No prunes! And I didn't know how to say it. See, in Jewish or in German, it's "flaumen". Now look: here is apricots. In Russian, it's "aprikosi". Now don't you see that there is a root to it? That's why I could understand a lot of things.

I use to get together with Mrs. Luxemburg. She was very wonderful to me. She used to take me to all the teas that she went, she taught me how to bake bagels. It was in a small town. You have to do these things. The bread was terrible, so we used to bake bread and bagels, and I never did things like that. But she spoke a little German. And I spoke Yiddish. Now that was a theater! I wish anybody would record this, the way we used to get together speaking. Grandpa would understand, he used to laugh at it. She always said, "Oh, your mother—*dein mutter*, *Ver zeine zey g'freiden*. It means, she'll be so happy. It's not *g'freiden*, it's *tsu freiden*. She couldn't speak German either! Her people were German, but she could speak as much German as you could speak Yiddish! But she tried.

Now the two of us—and I would tell her, she wanted to know how it is in Europe, of Jewish life, of the life of anybody there—and I don't think she understood a word, but she enjoyed it so much. Now there is where I had to learn, a little. And then, little by little. . . There was Sarah Epstein. Here, Eppy, they called her. They lived across the street from the Pachters. That was his wife. She spoke Yiddish beautifully. You would think she just came from Europe. But her mother couldn't speak a word of English. So I decided, I'd rather I speak English.

So, of course the children spoke English to me, and when they went to school, I tried to learn. I think I tried very hard. So this is little by little. And I know my mistakes, even today. If I make a mistake, I know it, at least I do. And then I used to go to the PTA meetings. They would kill me! You know, to sit at the meetings. When Emma went to school, I had to go to the meetings. And then I

joined the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. I learned so much. I couldn't be active because I wouldn't know what, but I tried. That was after the First World War. And I think I grew with the children. I grew with them.

Later I did speak English at home. Grandpa and I used to speak English. We spoke Jewish a lot. We had a language of our own that we had coined ourselves. That was funny, that nobody else would understand. A combination of something that we used to laugh at each other, that nobody else does.

See, the children started to school. I used to go to the meetings. If I didn't understand it, I tried to, I asked. And they would help me in those years. And I remember when Emma and Florence were debating, they were always in a debating team, they always got the best marks. I used to be there, and hear all the things, and understand it. And then there was a music appreciation class. That I loved.

The kids would buy the records, and play it at home. Then one evening, they would play it in school, and they would get credit on it. So that was in the evening, and I used to go, and, oh, I was in heaven. It was so wonderful, because music is music, every place. Not that I—I loved it, I didn't learn it. Maybe I could—your dad laughed at me one time, when they first became engaged to marry—that I said, if I would be in my children's circumstances, I would be as great as they are! He laughed at me! He thought it was so funny.

So you see, people that didn't have the chance, you could do better. But I think I've done pretty good, because a lot of people didn't do as good as I did. So I'm very happy. I'm happy that I can talk to you.

And, you know, writing—it seems to me that I learn with every word I write, even today. Every grocery bill I wrote, I learned from it. Because if I didn't, I looked it up in the dictionary. I still do it today. So that's how I learned as much as I know today. And if I could go to school, I would love it, but I can't. I tried Spanish. I thought I could do it. In the beginning, it was wonderful, I just sailed. Just because I knew other languages. But when it came to grammar, it was hard. And then the teacher had changed, so I sort of faded out.

I said, "I am a Spanish drop-out." Now I'm taking Hebrew, and I hope to take it again. I only hope I'll have the strength to do it, because I don't sleep very good anyway, so I start being up about six or seven o'clock. And 20 after 7, I get out of bed and then the bus leaves and I have to be 9:30 there. So I learn from other people. I did not learn to write or be able to speak well, or read without the vowels. But I'll still learn Hebrew, as much as I can learn.

They say that Yiddish has nothing to do with Hebrew, but I know it does. The only thing, you have to pronounce the words. Now, suppose, I had read a little poem. I had read it and understood it the first three times I went. And I read it to my teacher and she says, it's perfect. And translated it at the same time, to English. And this woman that teaches us, has such an atrocious accent that I don't know. She is so mad at herself, she says it. She's from Germany. She's from Hitler land. They traveled from one country to another. She had a baby in every country. The way she tells us, she wanted to get a diaper and didn't know how to say it, in French. Or someplace else.

And we'll still go on and I will learn more words. But I will not learn to read and to write. Maybe if I'd be there—I can remember things good. And I can find the roots, what it says. But when it comes to grammar, I'm not there. I learned a little story, the way the boy tells what he does in the morning. The way he gets up

and when he washes and he dresses and he eats his breakfast and he goes to school. How do they make the name of a football? Listen to that: *kadour* is a ball. A foot is called *regel*. So in Hebrew, in Israel, in modern Hebrew—in the Bible Hebrew, they didn't know of these things, so they had to find something—that's why it is *kadour regel*. Means, a football. You see?

Now we're Ashkenazi. We talk the Ashkenazi Yiddish, I mean Hebrew. There are people who could talk Hebrew, but not their Hebrew. They took the Sephardic. You know who the Sephardim are, you heard of them if you don't know them. They speak it that way. Now we say *shabbas*. They say *shabbat*. The emphasis is on the end. We say *tsoris*, troubles. That's done in Yiddish, I didn't even know that it's Hebrew. *Tsorim* means one, plural is *tsoris*. They say *tsarat* instead of *tsoris*. But, you see, knowing this helped me to understand. And even when they say, *be vacha sha*—that means "please"—we used to say, *ba-KAH-sha*, I ask a *bakahsha* from you, I plead, I ask something.

That's why it helped me a little bit, although the teacher doesn't agree. Yiddish she does not mention, she says, it's not Yiddish, Yiddish is not a language. But I'm telling you, it is. And before you know—I wouldn't live to see it—the Hebrew language will grow and grow because you have to use new words—you have to have them. That's how Yiddish has worked. You have to use—wherever the Jew had traveled, and they traveled enough, always dispersed from one land to another, they picked up the language, the words from the country they are in. Now if I would live in Russia all the time, I would use a Russian word. If I would be in Israel and I don't even know Hebrew, I would use a Hebrew word. And that's the way, by traveling, we picked up all the words from all the lands. That's the way I feel.

Aunt Edith and I talk a lot of Yiddish. There are some times, even in the States, that you can't express it unless you say something in Yiddish. There are boys and girls like you that take up Yiddish in school, in the universities, even. I asked Buzzy why. He said, so they can understand the dirty jokes on the stage.

Oh, it's nice, it's interesting, even if it's hard.

I can speak Russian, I understand it. I can write it, too, but it would be hard on me because I mix it with English. Latvian is something I didn't know in my life, until Latvia was born.

When I first came over from Europe, I couldn't talk English. And I couldn't understand Freida's, Pop's cousin's, Yiddish. I'll tell you why. She comes from Poland. They talk different than what we do. Now the Russian Jews that come from southern Russia, they speak something like us but a little prettier, a little better. She speaks a Polish Yiddish. I can't explain to you—you have it in Hebrew, too, that people speak different in different parts of the world. In fact, I read an article one time, that they can tell people by the way they talk, where they come from. I can, too, sometime. How I recognized that fellow, that he comes from my territory. That time when I discovered my cousin Lippa in Canada.

And I went to night school. When I came to Altoona I went to night school and I was already pregnant with Arnold. And I learned a little bit—not much. And the rest came along. After all, I've been here 65 years, on October—66 years. We got a dictionary but I couldn't read English, don't forget, so that would be hard. So I went along. But I really learned from the children, when they used to come home and study, and I learned with them. And everything, I remembered.

The Family Remembers

The Family Remembers

Emma

[from her notes to Florence]

In Washington Avenue period:
Do you remember filling up balloons with gas from a stove in the basement?—how risky!
Watching the men filling up the coal bin through a small window.
Following the ice wagon for a small piece to suck on.
Planting a "peach" tree from school—it never produced anything.
Watching peonies come to bud, which were always snipped off before they blossomed—possibly by a rabbit.

Recollections from the cottage:
Playing badminton, playing mah jong and cards.
Hiking, berry-picking, boating, swimming, swinging in the hammock, picnics.
Company—Mama always tired from extra cooking.
Kerosene lamps, outhouse, carrying buckets of water. Later, electricity and running water.
Papa fishing all day—late for supper.
Washing diapers in the river.
Buying things at Risbon's.
The narrow, winding dirt road leading to the cottage.
Making butter with the mixmaster.
Listening to singing far up and down the river.
The sweet, damp smell in the air.
Pictures of sexy girls on the walls: "I don't know what I'll do to entertain him." "I'm the one with the part in the back."
The sign SYLVIA over the front porch. The name was frequently called out by passersby on the river.
Squeaky double beds in the guest rooms.
Mama sitting outside cleaning and cutting vegetables.
Using flashlights at night. Listening to crickets in the dark stillness.

"A car is a car." Several times when they were looking for their parked car, Mama would start getting into any old battered car that didn't remotely resemble Papa's car, except for the color.

Once, when Emma was an infant, Mama got the scare of her life. With the baby sleeping in the carriage Mama proceeded to pull it up a flight of stairs. When she got to the top and looked into the carriage, it was empty—the baby had disappeared! She quickly ran down the stairs. There at the bottom lay Emma, still sleeping peacefully on the pad which had quietly slipped out of the tilted carriage.

(1918) Mama got Emma into school before she was six by making her a year older. Several years later, a teacher said, "Your mother lied."

Mama was an excellent coach for poetry recitations or dramatic readings. Insisted on putting in the right "expression".

For years Mama made no other cake but sponge cake. Long conversations with Mr. Colbus when he delivered eggs.

Bath and shampoo always Thursday nights.

When older children were under school age they were allowed to hang Christmas stockings on the kitchen wall. Later discontinued.

Washington Ave.—identical house next door. Mama walked into Mrs. Stritlmatter's kitchen. "Is there anything I can do for you?" "Is there anything I can do for you?"

[March 3, 1934, letter from Mama to Emma] "I had a nasty week the last one. I had decided to get rid of the balance of my teeth and had it

done last Saturday. Was I sick for a couple of days! Papa says it's quite all right to have a wife without teeth so she can't bite."

Mama attended all the P.T.A. meetings she could. Loved to make contact with teachers and educated persons. Would speak of someone with near-reverence as she said, "Well, she has a high school education!" "Learn everything you can while you are young."

Also admired women who had a career outside the home.

Mama always loved lilacs because she had had them at home in Latvia.

Sang unfalteringly on key. Most remembered lullaby, "Vykhozhu." When melody was without words: "loo-lee-loo-lee-loo". Yiddish and operatic tunes.

Mama's sayings:
"Don't be selfish."
"Children, don't fight."
"You're the oldest, you should know better."
"Yes, mein kind." "Meine kinderlach."
"Always be good friends with your neighbors."
"So it is, so what?"
"So I won't be the queen of the ball."
"It's time for me to be gray."
"I'm so proud of you, I shoot off all I know."
"Sounds pretty good, isn't it?"
"Last week (1933) I went to a W.I.L. meeting—it was divine." Also, Ladies Aid meetings and card parties (used to sound like "Ladies-Ex-Society"). Also Federation meeting and sisterhood affairs.

Birthday parties followed the same pattern she had set for Emma: 5, 10, and 13. Never forgot the criticism she received for serving tea at the first 5-yr.-old party.

Sewed outfits for the children at various times, but never felt she was good at it. Once made me a Halloween costume of brightly colored leaves. By the time I came home from the party, they were completely curled up.

Before babysitters: When Mama and Papa had to go to the movies in the evening, seven-yr.-old Emma was left in charge of the other three children. Later, as they grew older, she and Florence shared the responsibility for the other two. The biggest problem for the older two was getting the younger two to go to bed on time. Once they "punished" Belle by not allowing her to go to bed when she finally wanted to: No matter how sleepy she was, she had to stay up and suffer.

[From Emma, to Tela:]
Grandpa didn't make a show of affection to Grandma. But my teenage diary shows sentimental incidents between them. Grandpa didn't like to admit emotional things. Grandma and I used to be mad at him for this.

We learned early to take responsibility for ourselves. The streets were safer in those days. As six-yr.-olds we walked the mile to Wright School and crossed all the streets without benefit of school patrols. When I was seven I walked downtown to Papa's store so he could take me to the Altoona Hospital to have my tonsils and adenoids removed. On the way downtown, I remember saying to a neighbor, "Guess where I'm going—to the hospital! Isn't that wonderful!" Little did I know what lay in store for me. At age eight,

I was deemed old enough to take a streetcar all the way to Hollidaysburg where I received scalp treatments for dandruff. Through all these "privileges", Grandma constantly emphasized the trust she had in us, and so built up our confidence and self-esteem.

[Emma to Florence:] Imagination: "power of forming pictures in the mind of things not present to the senses. Ability to create new things or ideas or to combine old ones in new forms." Don't you think it's unfair to Mama to make a blanket statement that she had no imagination? Perhaps she just didn't care for fantasies and fairy tales. I can't think of any specific incidents; but it seems to me—

Her unusual sensitivities to people showed that she could "imagine" how the other felt.

Since she frequently projected herself and others into another time and place, she had to "imagine" the new situation.

She had the ability to see around a subject and consider all its ramifications, thereby "imagining" more than met the eye.

Also, Mama was resourceful. If something she needed was not at hand, she could "imagine" what to use as a substitute or find some new way of using what she had.

Florence

[from her book about her parents, Roses in December]

Dear Mama,

How many people 85 years get a love letter? Yet that is exactly what this is.

We love you for your strength. You represent to your children, their children and their children's children, the basis of all we build on. Your strength has established a foundation for all of the values that we live by and has pointed out to us the treasures that are really worth taking into account.

We love you for your emotional frankness. You have shown us, in letters and cards, that it is not impossible to say deep-felt loving words that warm the heart, and if this letter brings on a tear, remember that the writer learned from a master, yourself.

We love you for your alert intellect which keeps all of us open to learning what is not directly related to making a living or making a home. There are not many grandchildren who share with pleasure their intellectual activity with an 85-year-old but our children are among the few who are fortunate.

We love you for the pride you take in yourself in the physical person you show to the world. From the way you look in body and in the bearing that shows your spirit, we have learned the quality of self-respect, a quality the world is quick to recognize. We love you for your lack of perfection, for not always being sweet and in even temper, and for now and then showing a weakness or two. Without the yeast of variation, the dough would be flat, dull and not very tasty.

In short, Mamma, we love you because you are you.

Cornerstone

An afghan is a worsted blanket commonly used in informal living rooms and it is, in most cases, hand-made. To me and to the members of my family it is far, far more than a blanket; it is the cornerstone of home.

My mother, whose strongpoint is not fine handwork, learned to make an afghan of cheerful, variegated yarns. Beginning with a seven-stitch chain, she crocheted patches and then put the bright squares together with black yarn. The black yarn between the patches set off the brilliant colors and the scalloped edging unified the work into a gay mass of joyful hues.

As each of my sisters and brothers and I married, my mother made us an afghan, always in the same pattern and in the same lively colors. My youngest sister, traveling with her soldier husband, used her afghan to establish her home wherever the army sent her. No matter where she lived the chains of stitches were links to those she loved and the warm colors lit home fires for her in many cold and comfortless rooms.

In my house the afghan was a paradox. Its warm wooliness in winter was a shield against drafts for those who chose the spot in the living room which caught the air currents. But in summer it offered smooth comfort to bare-legged people who sat on the scratchy sofa.

Eventually my mother's grandchildren married and the oldest ones received with delight the afghans which had come to symbolize permanence and stability and warm family relationships. In spite of the inevitable mobility of those who are part of the new American way of life, our young people took with them the bright blanket into which their grandmother had stitched such love, and when they flung it over a sofa they felt themselves to be part of an extended family and not just an isolated couple.

When my father died the afghan became a source of comfort to the maker as well as to the users. The family realized that my mother was losing interest in life and that something more than grief for my father was affecting her. It became clear to us that the basic ingredient of my mother's life had been removed; she felt that she was no longer needed. And so my home developed an immediate and pressing need for a second afghan and of course my mother was asked to make it. As she crocheted and chained and counted, the feeling of uselessness and of not being needed gradually melted away. My mother knew that she was adding warmth to the home of one of her children and she understood that this need had no limits.

If, for some reason, I were placing notes in a cornerstone for the eyes of people yet to be born, I would include some of those bright wool squares, pages from the book of my family's life.

[a letter from Mama to Emma in St. Louis, about Florence's wedding]

February 18, 1935 10:57 a.m.

Dearest Chanale,

Thanks a lot for the valentine. The candy was delicious, the snap shot very good of you. Happy to hear that the wedding box was a success. Did you know that the pieces of white cake were parts of the wedding cake? It meant good luck to all of you.

Poor Florence, she forgot to cut the cake at the table, she was so excited greeting the Gerhards and being in the hurry to go away. Well, we can't hate her for that. In spite of all the aggravation, arguments and inexperience, the wedding turned out to be a grand affair. It was not so little either. Mr. Pearlmutter couldn't tell all about it, for he was not here in the beginning. I was happy to see him even if he came late, though I did not have time to give him much attention. I received many compliments for the table decoration, the menu and the service. Florence and Ruby looked adorable. Everything was so simple and home like and yet so beautiful. If there wouldn't be any objections I should like to make

your wedding just like it, with a few corrections here and there. It would be very easy for us now, for we know exactly how to go about it.

Darling, 'til the last minute, I thought you would be here. My heart just went out for you to be here. I waited for the telephone to ring that you are on the station. I am happy that you had a chance to be at a dance that night, to be with us in your thoughts.

Philadelphia was very well represented, we are thankful for that. Uncle Bill Rabin is as funny as ever, God bless him. He certainly put pep into the crowd.

Well, one week has passed since then. We are so happy and yet so sad. I feel an empty place in my heart and have another lonely bed in the house. Yesterday I sat in the front room looking at the big clock, thinking what took place last Sunday at certain hours, tears rolling down my cheeks. I do miss her so much. I suppose we'll get used to that. I was very brave while the ceremony was going on. I didn't cry a bit. Did all my crying before. Papa and Belle did their bit.

The newlyweds blew in from New York last night. They looked as happy and sweet as can be. I needn't tell you how happy I was to see them—didn't expect them. After having a chat, a cup of tea and a bite, they grabbed the rest of their things and left for Barnesboro. Their furniture isn't in yet but the springs and mattresses. So they will have to manage somehow.

Give my best regards to all the P.'s, the former and the present. Mr. Pearlmutter made a hit in Altoona. Be well and happy. Do not forget to write some time.

Love and kisses,
Mama

Belle

Prejudice was unheard of and not tolerated in our family. A case in point:

When I was six or seven, we lived in a lower middle class neighborhood in Altoona where there were also two or three black families. We called them "the colored kids" and that term was acceptable to all concerned. One family in particular had children who later became a town policeman, a nurse, a used furniture dealer, and a musician who walked past our house several times a week with a Sousaphone towering above his head to some job that was never made clear to me. A polio survivor, he also limped noticeably.

The future furniture dealer was named "Clement" and I played with him a lot. One day, for reasons that escape me, I called him a "nigger" and he slapped my face immediately. White faced and holding back tears, I retreated to my house and told my mother what had happened. "Serves you right!" she said, and went about her business. That was the end of that and I got the message.

In 1969 when my mother was 79 and living in California, my daughter Valerie became engaged. Her fiancé was a fellow student at Penn State with a promising future in the law and they were very much in love. He was from a family of devout Catholics from Chester, PA, who were not aware that their son was not as devout as they would have preferred. We met them once before the wedding and they seemed to be nice people. The wedding was to occur in Philadelphia, a 3 _ hour ride from Chambersburg.

I remember telling my mother of the engagement with trepidation. Valerie was the first of the *michpoche* to marry "out of the faith" and I was terrified of her reaction. "Is he a nice boy? Does he treat

Valerie with respect? Will he make her happy?" she asked and, on hearing affirmative answers, she replied, "Let her be happy!"

The wedding was to be in the chapel of a Reform temple whose rabbi had asked only that the groom-to-be take a course in Judaism, and did not insist on conversion. He took the course, successfully, and the wedding took place.

There were all kinds of difficulties that arose from trying to plan a wedding mostly on the telephone—menu, decorations, wedding cake, music, how not to offend, how to respond to the new "family", how to deal with unexpected blistering heat, most of all, how to judge my mother's real feelings about mixed-marriages, etc., etc., all of which resulted in my becoming a total wreck with a glassy smile while sheathed in a new dress, somehow of questionable style and color.

My mother had eighteen grandchildren. She made a great point of saying that she loved them all the same and never played favorites. At the wedding dinner, however, when her turn came to make a little speech, she rose, and with a twinkle in her eye, she said, after a few platitudes, "You all know I love all my grandchildren the same, but tonight, Valerie, I love you the best."

As I listened, my tension began to dissipate. My mother had approved, eased, accepted. I relaxed—My daughter had married a fine young man. L'Chaim!

[Belle's letter to the New York Times, Nov. 3, 1996]

To the Editor: Your article about summer cottages ("A Cabin, a Lake, a Memory," Sept. 8) and a resort ad with the heading "Summer as it used to be" reminded me of my family's summer cottage on the Raystown River near Everett, Pa. Built during the Depression, it had no electricity, no heat except a fireplace, no bathroom and no water except a slim trickle out of a pipe in a nearby lot. Anyone who visited was greeted with two buckets and ordered to fill them.

The cottage had a large screened porch, the center for meals and various activities. A wind-up Victrola stood proudly in the living room. Our rowboat was so heavy nobody could maneuver it to the dock.

Papa sold the cottage for $3,000, completely furnished, in 1950. We had all married by then and moved away.

About 20 years ago I was driving with my son and came to the turnoff to the cottage. On a whim we took the road. We turned and there were the cottages—but they all looked so substantial, so solid. Basements had been dug, furnaces installed, septic systems, electricity.

After 10 minutes my son called me: "Here it is." There, on the doorpost, was a mezuza, painted over many times but still a symbol of my immigrant father who, even while vacationing, even while professing to be agnostic, felt the need to declare himself.

Chambersurg, PA

Arnold

My earliest memory is an event of epic proportion which made me very proud of myself at the time. I was about three on the day that I pulled the kitchen chair over to the sink, climbed on it, and was able to reach the faucet and wash my hands without help. Climbing down, I ran into the living room and hollered, "Mama! Mama! I washed my hands all by myself!" She scooped me up and gave me a

big kiss and didn't say a word about the puddles of water I had trailed behind me on the floor.

If she had been angry with me, she would have grabbed me by my thick curly hair and delivered a well-deserved smack on my behind before I got away. The hair grabbing usually didn't hurt, but the smack did. With four children at the time, Mama had to be a strict disciplinarian. We were a close, loving family, but if punishment was due, there was no "Let's sit down and discuss it" business. We were smacked then and there. Of course, as we got older, different methods were found to be more effective. The system must have worked, because none of us turned out to be a delinquent.

My older sister Emma was enrolled in first grade before she was six because Mama lied a little about her age. That first year wasn't easy for Emma, and when Mama went to the parent-teacher conference, she was told that Emma might be "a little slow". At that, Mama blurted out, "Well, what do you expect? She isn't even six yet!"

Realizing that she was caught in a lie about Emma's age, she was terribly embarrassed. The school year was half over, so they decided to let Em stay the rest of the year. She ended up graduating from Altoona High School with the second highest average in a class of over a thousand students.

Mama ruled the house, but when Papa came home after a 12-hour day at the store, we kids had to be quiet. Papa never smacked any of us for any reasons. All it took was a certain look and we got the message. His word was law. Despite the long hours at the store, Papa was active in charity for new immigrants, ran for city treasurer on the Socialist ticket and got clobbered, and convinced the mayor to send truckloads of food to striking coal miners.

Mama had great faith in Witch Hazel, which she used copiously for nearly everything that ailed us. I was an active kid and got more than my share of cuts, bumps, and bruises. One particularly nasty cut did require a doctor's care. It was stitched up, but it wouldn't heal and became badly infected. A second trip to the doctor was too expensive, so Mama laid me out on top of her sewing machine and applied a Witch Hazel compress every half hour. It healed up fine!

Birdie

Beginning its life in the Berman family in 1936 after the move to 3003 Third Avenue, the desk, a traditionally-styled mahogany kneehole, was placed in front of the window in the sun porch. It was used by both Mama and Papa. Eventually, of course, it became Mama's alone.

It traveled with her to California in 1962 where it fit neatly into her Leisure World living room. The apartment in Altoona that she moved into in 1979 already contained a desk, so the original one remained on the West Coast and became mine.

It sat in our bedroom, looking rather elegant, until a few years ago when, because it was the only desk in the house deep enough to hold them, it was crowned with a computer, a keyboard, and a printer. In spite of the incongruous-looking equipment sitting on it, we still refer to it as "Mama's desk".

After twenty-two years of abiding with us most of the drawers have become filled with miscellaneous things that are mine. However, a few drawers still hold various items that were Mama's, such as an assortment of letters which are waiting to be sorted and returned to children and grandchildren. The rest of the things seem to fall into the following categories:

Legal and Financial: Social Security documents, a letter from Mama's lawyer Martin Goodman, a copy of her will, and a notebook listing her income and its sources for several years in the mid-seventies plus the subsequent tax returns.

Practical: a small round pencil sharpener, a thimble, a tiny address book filled with familiar names, a Temple Beth Israel Sisterhood Year Book for 1970-72, a small screwdriver, and a paperweight labeled "Pioneer Women/Builder in Israel".

Unfathomable: a 4x6 booklet printed in Russian in 1934, the year of Mama's trip to Europe, and a lined notebook with a picture of Shirley Temple wearing a Hawaiian outfit on the cover. (The notebook had been mine when I was about eight.) What would Shirley think if she knew that the last twenty-six pages, starting from back to front, were covered with Yiddish handwriting?

Whimsical: a key chain with an attachment which when held up to the eye in a good light displays a tiny picture of Mama looking very good in a bathing suit.

Touching: a postcard sent in 1937 from Papa in Florida to Mama in Altoona signed "Your only husband, Abe", a single colorful crocheted afghan square, an Altoona Mirror clipping printed in 1941 telling of Arnold's receiving his optometry degree, and the June 17,1952 Memorial Book from Papa's funeral containing the many signatures of the attendees and another clipping from the Mirror, this one with Papa's obituary.

The last item holds a special place in my heart—a twice-folded, yellowed piece of paper which when opened reveals what looks like dark green crumbs. The note on the outside says in Mama's hand-writing "1934—a leaf from my mother's grave".

Norman Karp

Although I was the first grandchild and probably had quite a bit of attention from my grandparents on that basis, I could not think of a real story to relate. My memories of Grandma seemed to revolve around her working in the kitchen.

Bagels at breakfast were special when we visited Altoona. This was always a treat that I never experienced elsewhere. This was not a common item in the 1940's, and not an item at all in Kittanning. Altoona was quite sophisticated in comparison to my home town!

Thinking of Grandma in the kitchen leads one's thoughts to the cottage. Not the remodeled cottage after electric came to the neighborhood, but the cottage where one carried many buckets of water for cooking, cleaning and showering purposes. The kitchen I remember had a stove that burned coal oil (kerosene, a big step up from a wood burner), a wood icebox that needed regular deliveries of ice, and a churn to pump up butter. My memory is more of squeezing the yellow into the white oleomargarine to make it look like butter. Everybody helped Grandma snap the ends of the fresh green beans when they were in season.

Finally, as I lay in bed a more exciting memory came to me. The memory of learning to swim in the muddy, shallow Raystown Branch of the Susquehanna river. Grandpa had a heavy wooden rowboat for fishing in which I frequently rowed Grandma up and down the river. (The cottage was named the Sylvia and I think the boat was also.) As Grandma Sylvia rowed and my other Grandma Karp rode, they yelled directions to me (maybe 8 years old) as I splashed behind the boat until I became buoyant and started to swim behind the boat. I can remember the success as well as I can remember the swimming shoes and itchy green wool swimming trunks that I wore that day. What excitement to tell Grandpa!

Tela Cohn

[Letter from Grandma, Feb. 9, 1977]

My dear Tela,

Thank you for your letter. I understand how you feel about Aunt Edith—I knew for a long time what was coming but still was hoping that it will not-- Now she could have lived and really have pleasure from her family. Gerri is married to a nice Jewish boy and is happy. Mark is married for the 2nd time. His wife is pregnant and they have a nice home and seem to be very happy. Jordan, the son, and his family are fine. His daughter is taking up law and is a top student. His son is at Yale University and is taking up economics. His marks are 5+ and then some. Bea, the mother, is fine but did not come to see Edith nor did she come to the funeral. Edith had a lot of courage. She had arranged everything and left no loose ends.

As for myself—well—I am coming to myself slowly. I miss her so much! She meant so much to me, beside that she was the sister of Grandpa. She was my best friend! But the living must live and I too hope to live. Thank God for my family, for their love and devotion (You are included).

It is good to know that you are having a happy life in Williamstown. Thank you for telling me everything about Joe and the children. I had a phone call from Howard and Nicole last Sunday. It was wonderful to hear their voices. I wish Joe and Mac success in everything they are planning to do. Please, when you see Howard and Nicole, tell them how much I appreciated their call. I also want to thank you for your previous letter you wrote to me when you first came to Williamstown.

My love to, Joe, and the four little dolls. I often think of them. What a wonderful bunch they are. Please write again some time.

Grandma

Danni Karp

Every summer of my childhood I visited Grandma and Grandpa Berman in Altoona for a week or two. When I recall those vacations, I am flooded with memories about our mornings together. I immediately smell Pond's Dry Skin Cream which Grandma would regularly apply to her magnificent, smooth skin. Each morning I would sit on her bed and talk with her, waiting for her to emerge from a cedar walk-in closet in an elaborate constrictive girdle, needed to relieve her hernia discomfort. Later Grandpa would place soft boiled eggs in white egg cups and the three of us would eat breakfast together in a cozy nook lined with knick knacks.

My grandparents' home was peaceful and quiet. It had a corner library room walled with bookcases and windows. I would sit at a mahogany desk there for hours, pretending I was a teacher or librarian. The house had two upstairs bathrooms. I was amazed that I could usually have my choice of which to use and was bored by how each looked with their plain white ceramic tile floors and walls.

Grandma seemed to be especially happy when chatting with Sam, the huckster, who would arrive twice weekly with fresh fruits and vegetables. I loved how she seemed capable of having a conversation with all kinds of people. Now I wonder if this was a prelude to so many of her grandchildren choosing to work in human service fields that require skillful communication with others.

The calm mood of the household shifted dramatically during the summer of the McCarthy Hearings. Our dinners, usually a time for conversation, changed. I was bewildered by the tense silence that prevailed when my grandparents listened to the proceedings on the radio. What memories those broadcasts must have stirred in them as they recalled their lack of freedom in bygone days!

One summer my grandparents stunned me by telling each of us grandchildren that we could purchase one item of our choice at a downtown store. I agonized over this decision, as though there would never be another birthday or Chanukah. I chose roller skates for this remarkable non-holiday gift and raced up and down sidewalks in Altoona and my hometown of Kittanning for the next few years.

Grandma knew how to show a kid a good time, schlepping me on a streetcar to Lakemont Park. She didn't allow her frequent spells of fatigue to interfere with our jaunts. She rarely became impatient while I dawdled, selecting penny photos of my favorite movie stars in an arcade.

I can still hear her voice, caressing me with "Bubbala" and "Kinderlach", words no one else ever called me. But, then again, no one else ever bought me a red plaid dress for my very first day of school.

Grandma knew how to make me feel special, the gift she gave to everyone whose life she touched.

Steve Berman

When I think of Grandma, one of the things I remember best was her sugar cookies. Part of visiting her always seemed to involve filling up on those great cookies.

After she passed away, I was given a startling reminder of how good those cookies really were. When I worked for Blair County, one of my supervisees brought in cookies that looked exactly like Grandma's. She left one on each of our desks. When I saw it, I immediately felt nostalgia for Grandma. I took the cookie out of its plastic wrapper and took a bite. It was the worst thing I had ever tasted. Then I turned the cookie over, saw it had a piece of string attached, and realized that it was a Christmas tree ornament.

Marilyn Cohn

Grandma was always interested in what was currently happening with young people and we had many good discussions while I was in college in the late-sixties:

Here are a couple of memorable one-liners from Grandma:
-"We had free love in my day, too, you know !"
-"I'm glad you are fighting against oppression, but you have no idea what oppression from the government is really like."
-"When you get to be in your twenties you have to treat family like friends and keep the friendship alive—and some people you like better than others."

I also have a story from when I stayed with her for a week when I was eight years old. She got a call from an Arthur Murray Dance studio that she had won free dance lessons. For some reason she was so embarrassed about it and made me promise to keep it a secret. I felt very privileged and proud to have a secret with my grandma; only now do I realize how silly it really was. But at the time, it seemed very special and Grandma took it seriously, too. She wrote me a special note later to tell me that it was now all right to tell people and to thank me for keeping her secret. I still have the note.

There is Larry's story, that he told at the Berman Family Reunion: We had an engagement party before our wedding at Blairmont, in December right before Grandma died. Larry and I went to spend the morning with Grandma at the Penn Alto in her little suite before the party so they could get to know one another. When Grandma found

out that Larry was a child psychologist, she asked him many questions. Finally she asked him quite seriously, "Do you think I did a good job raising my children?"

David Schulman

I have two favorite Grandma stories, and both happened the same year.

When I left for college in the Fall of 1969, Grandma lived ten minutes away from us in Leisure World, Seal Beach, CA. She'd moved there in 1960, when I was nine, so she had been a regular part of my life all those years. Two things happened my freshman year that highlight how lucky I was to have her so nearby.

That fall, I signed up for a Dostoyevsky seminar. When I came home for winter break, Grandma showed me a book I'd never seen at her house before. It was in Russian. "Look at the title," she said. Out of the unfamiliar Cyrillic type I finally discerned what looked like "idiot". Yes, it was a copy of Dostoyevsky's The Idiot.

She told me she'd received it soon after she'd arrived in the United States from someone she knew. After all, she couldn't read literature in English, and she needed something to read. Upon hearing I'd enrolled in a class on Dostoyevsky, she'd dug it out and begun reading it again. "After all," she said sweetly, "I wanted to have something we could talk about now that you're away at college. By the way, since I started reading it, I've begun dreaming, again, in Russian."

I love this story for two reasons. First, I love her gusto. She has a grandson at college? He's studying Dostoyevsky? *I'll* read Dostoyevsky. Second, I love her playfulness. So we'll have something to talk about now that I was away at college? As if!

The other story occurred at the end of that same year. Spring, 1970. Nixon invaded Cambodia, setting off massive student strikes at colleges across the country. National Guard troops killed four student demonstrators at Kent State.

My first Shabbat home after the year finally staggered to a close. My friend Doug joined Grandma and us for Shabbat dinner. Doug had just finished the year at UC Santa Barbara, where a Bank of America had been burned. Doug described how the police swept through Isla Vista, where most students lived off-campus, dragging many off porches and balconies to be arrested. Dad was incredulous that the police were doing that. But Grandma said, "Oh, I believe Doug. I remember the attempted revolution [in Russia] in 1905. The police treated the students the same way then, too."

I had two reactions to this remarkable statement. The first was, "Wow! Grandma remembers the attempted revolution of 1905! Sixty-four years ago, the same thing! She knows the police do such things!"

The other was that here I was, a young person wrestling with the moral dilemmas of the war, and with the tactics used by the protesters. My world felt like it was falling apart, and yet here was Grandma, calmly recalling another period of turmoil, giving me perspective. What stays with me most powerfully from that story is Grandma's balance and understanding, two qualities that were particularly precious to me that chaotic year. Terrible things have happened before. They'll happen again. We'll get through it. Such a simple message, but so comforting.

[David Schulman's afghan essay, which he read at the Berman Family Reunion, August 1997, over the spread-out afghans on the floor.]

Have you ever noticed how an afghan is a particularly interesting kind of blanket? It keeps you warm despite the holes in its fabric. This family also keeps you warm despite the empty spaces of those who are gone. For this moment, we sit together, linked together by common threads, real and metaphoric. Amidst the fun and joy of this week-end, we sit together for a moment now with another kind of joy. Not the joy of delight we've had so much of already, but a quieter, more reflective joy symbolized by these afghans, each a gift to children and grandchildren. Linked together across the space of this room by this amazing assembly created by one woman's hands, we are linked, also, across time. Common threads, afghans—and family—keep us warm.

Andy Gartenberg

I have many wonderful memories of Grandma.

The first is when I was very young. We would come up from Chambersburg for a weekend and I would sleep on the glider in Grandma's small back porch. I would love to sleep on it because it would swing. It was a great way to get to sleep. I have the glider and still enjoy it.

Another memory is when we would be at Grandma's, she would make coffee in the morning and it always smelled wonderful. I loved her push button stove.

The best memory I have of Grandma is when she would come into a room of people or a group would come to see her she would say, "Hello, everybody." Her voice would go up an octave or two from the excitement and she would hug everyone. That's the best memory I have of Grandma.

Songs

[Rewritten for Mama's 85th birthday, by her daughters]
Tune: "Those Were the Days"

It was in the year of eighteen-ninety,
March sixteenth, the date of your debut,
Since that day you've made our pathway shiny,
We all owe so very much to you.

This is your special date,
That's why we're here to state,
When you were made, they threw the mold away.
You're quite unique, you know,
Without you there's no show,
So take a bow, you are the star today.

La la la la, etc.

You came here from Latvia in Europe,
Joining your beloved from afar,
Some girls bring to marriage a big dowry,
You brought pillows and your sam-o-var.

You made our lives worthwhile,
You taught us how to smile,
And even taught us how to play tricks.
On you we still depend, you're grandma, mother, friend,
That's why we love you, 'cause you're such a brick!

La la la la, etc.

Tune: “Dearie”

Mama, do you remember baking
Bulkas for us to eat
At our Saturday movie treat
Fairbanks, Chaplin, and Valentino
Made us laugh and then cry,
Test your memory, oh
Mama, do you recall those shows pro-
Duced by the Arbeiter Ring
Some of us would play and sing.
Cheery, seldom dreary,
In the good old days gone by,
Do you remember, you should remember
‘Cause you’re a little older than I.
Mama, do you remember when we
All went to Cypher Beach,
Anything else was out of reach,
With that special two-seater building
Made by the W-P-A
Test your memory, oh
Mama, do you recall when we made
Butter from Besser’s cream
Somebody sure had a lot of steam!
Cheery, seldom dreary,
In the good old days gone by,
Do you remember, you should remember,
‘Cause you’re a little older than I.

Mama, do you remember Papa
Fixing his famous roast
While we all burnt the toast
Cooking with our kerosene stove that
Brought a tear to the eye,
Test your memory, oh
Mama, do you recall Papa
Had someone build a boat—
How in the world did that thing float?
Cheery, seldom dreary,
In the good old days gone by.
Do you remember, you should remember,
‘Cause you’re a little older than I.

Mama, we know the past has brought you
Many important things.
Now, see what the future brings,
Sitting there in all of your splendor
Catching everyone’s eye,
Test your memory, oh
Mama, it seems that you’ve been taking
Drinks from the Fountain of Youth,
Everyone knows we’re telling the truth!
Cheery, seldom dreary,
Just like the good old days gone by.
Do you remember, you should remember,
‘Cause you’re much younger than—
She’s much younger than—
You’re much younger than I.

Abraham Berman

[letter to family; original spelling maintained]

Today is my birthday and Im thankfull to my faith for reaching my 59th year.

Today is May the 16th 1948 and it happened to the day to fall out on a Sunday. So my family desided to celebrate my birthday one day ahead. Well, that suits me fine. I want to take atvantage of that record to record on it my sincere thanks to my beloved wife and all my children and children's children and to my beloved son in laws and to my beloved daughter in law Selma for participating in my celebration. Im also thankful to my faith for outliving the Hitler regime seeing them crushed and demolished. Im also happy that I lived long enough to see our Jewish dream of a homeland of our own to be fulfilled which we dreamed of close to 19 hundred years, and now my wish is as yet to live long enough to marry off our youngest daughter Birdie. I thank you all for being here and for everything what you have done for me to make me happy and I wish to be with you again next year.

Your loving father

Sima Gordin

[Tela's interview with her and Bella (translating from Yiddish) in San Francisco, January 2000]

Sylvia was living with Chaya and Isser in Riga before she left for the U.S. to marry Abe. He was just a boyfriend and Isser was upset that such a beautiful girl would go to the U.S. unmarried. When Sylvia arrived in Philadelphia, she sent a photo and letter to Chaya and Isser. She had taken the photo as soon as she got off the ship and had written on it, "*Frum mir, di glichlicheh Tsifka* ["From me, the very happy Tsifka."]."

The last time I saw Tsiveh was in 1934, when she came back to Latvia. There are a lot of photos of that visit but I don't know her from the pictures. She was a very interesting person, liked to joke and laugh, especially to joke about herself. When she told a joke, she put herself in it, as if it had happened to her. She was a very smart woman. Chaya and she were close. Chaya was tough and serious, but cried easily.

When Tsiveh arrived in Riga in 1934, we were all waiting at the train station—Aaron, Rachmiel, Tsalel's daughter Judith, Abrashka, Chaya. When we all got on the train to help her off, Sylvia thought Aaron was Isser. She shouted, "Isser!" Chaya said, "That's Aaron." At Chaya's house, Sylvia told us she didn't want to return home through Germany because she saw that all the big shops were boarded up with "JUDEN" written on them. It was only later, after she had made this remark, that the Latvian Jews said to themselves that there would be no writing or speaking or buying of anything German. Also, when Sylvia returned to Riga after seeing Samuel in Leningrad, she said, "I'm happy to be back in Latvia. In Leningrad all the old buildings and people are crying."

[Sima reads (and Bella translates) a letter from Grandma, written in Yiddish, from Seal Beach, California, in the late 1970's. Grandma wrote:]

I walk past my neighbors on the street with a cane—I can't hear so well, I can't see so well, I can't walk so well, and, any minute, I could fall down. So my neighbor asks, "How are you?" and I say, "Fine" (in a weak voice). And *Zey di naroyim* [They are such fools], *zey glaibn mir* [they believe me!]*!*

Album

Rezekne

July 2000

1 The ruin, in the old section of town along the Rezekne River.

2 Hotel Latgale, where Tela and Karen began their walk around the old section of town.

3 Their walk.

4 Darzu Street, one of the oldest streets and one mentioned in Sylvia Berman's 1934 journal.

5 Ludzas Street, listed in the Latvian registry as Tsalel's address in 1934.

6 The cathedral with the twin steeples that appears on the postcards and old photos taken from the ruin.

7 Bukmuižas Street, leading to the village of Bukmuža, where Abe (Buchmuz) Berman was from.

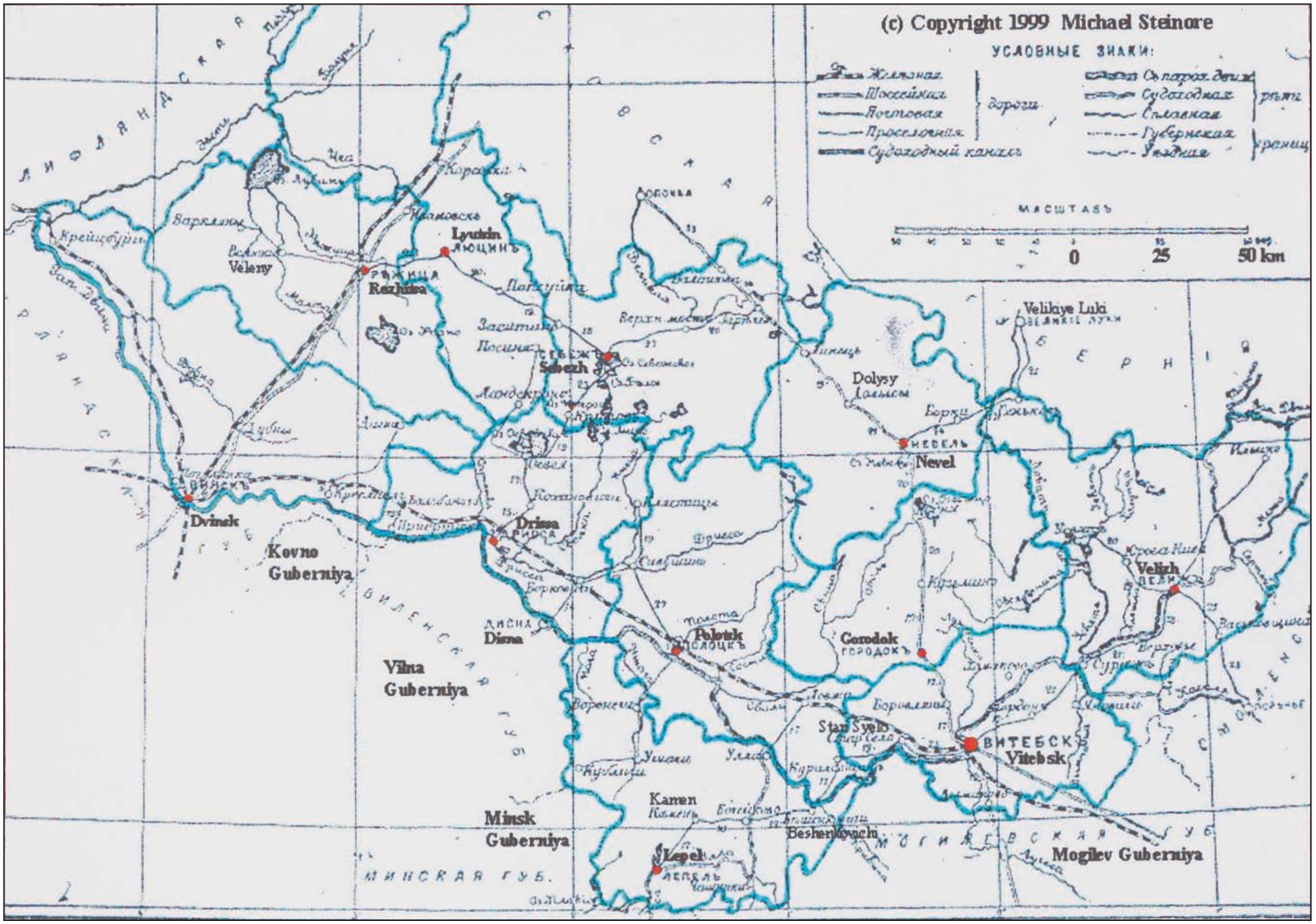
8 Atbrīvošanas Street, which leads to the railroad station.

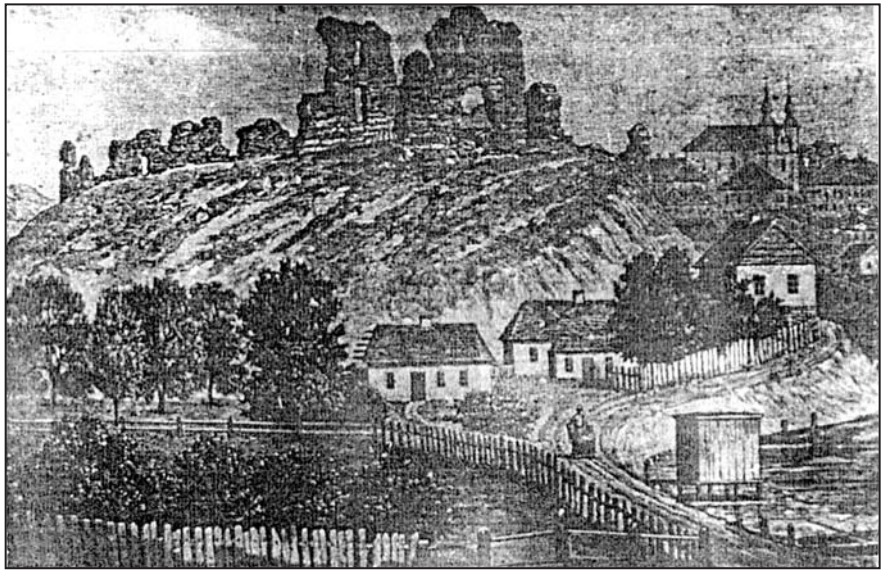
Among the birches along the Rezekne River in the old section of town.

Photo: Karen Zasloff

Vitebsk Guberniya, 1899

[*The First All-Russia Census of 1897, Vitebsk Guberniya*] Total population: 1,489,246 (215,919 live in cities). Jews and Karaims: 175,635. Yiddish as mother tongue: 174,240. The majority of Jews (52.09%) is concentrated in cities and towns where almost all of the industry and trade is in their hands. In every town of Vitebsk gubernia, Jews make up at least 1/2 of the total population. Jews' religious affiliation: Judaism 99.94%; Russian Orthodox .03%; Catholics .01%; Protestants .01%.





Latvian State Photo Archives, Riga

Nineteenth century sketch of Rezhitsa ruin. Cathedral at right.

Aaron Sholom Gordin, ca. 1905

Israel/Laib Gordin, brother of Aaron, Rezhitsa, ca. 1900.

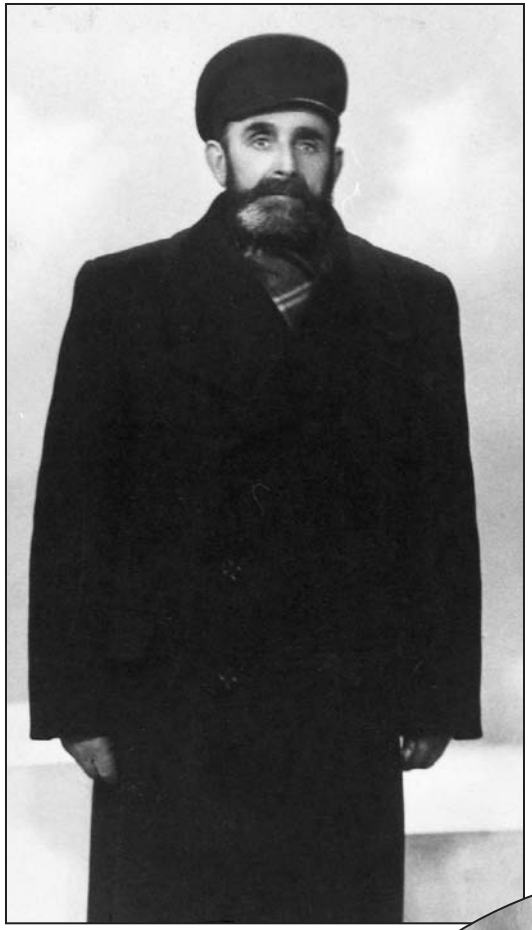
Rezhitsa water-carrier cart and driver. On right, Russian soldiers.

Tsiveh Gordin and mother, Brocha Liebeh, 1910.

Latvian State Photo Archives, Riga

Rezhitsa, 1910, street to railroad station.

Tsiveh and friend, 1906.

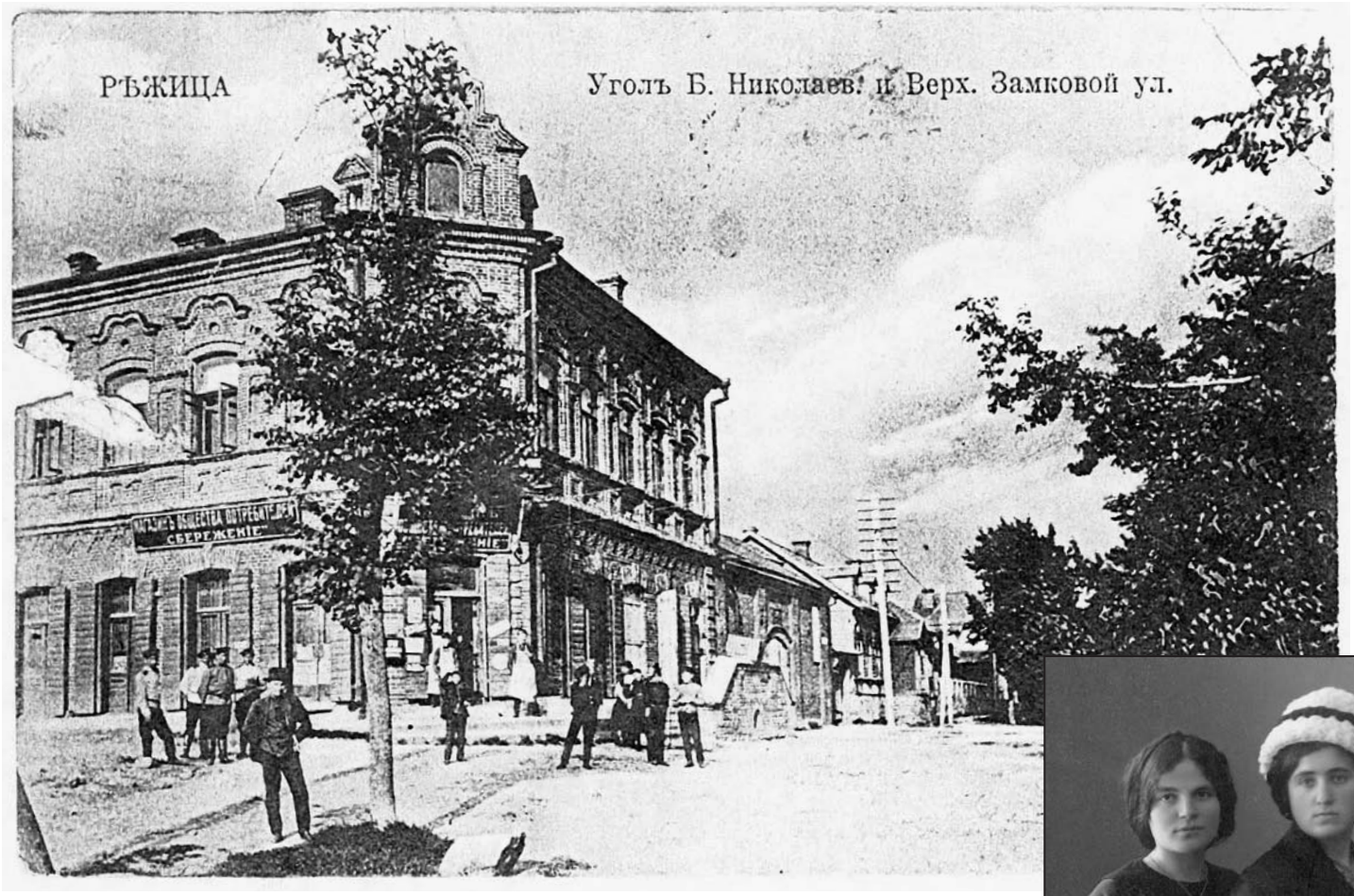


Hendel Gordin, ca. 1905.

Chaya Gordin, 1902.

Tsiveh Gordin, 1909

Samuel Gordin, ca. 1901.



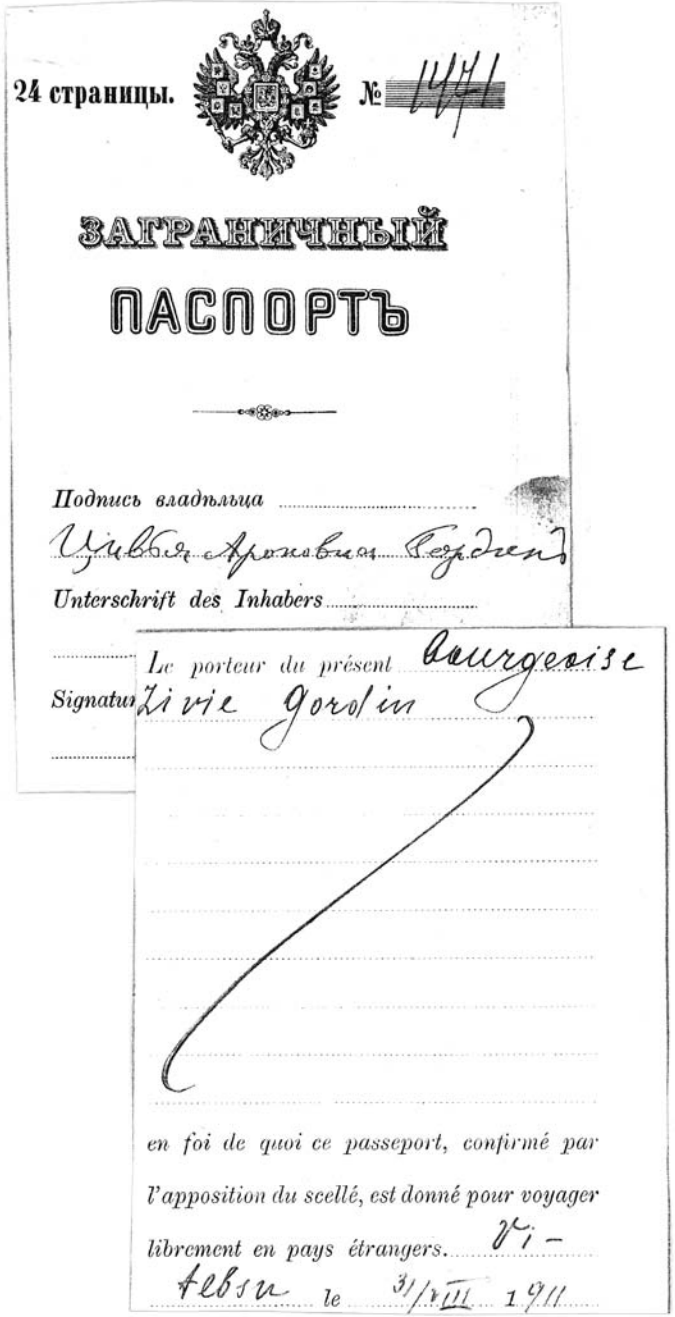
Rezhitsa, ca. 1910. This is the postcard Tsiveh took with her to the United States in 1911, which she mailed from Philadelphia to Abe Berman in Houtzdale, saying she was excited and ready for their wedding.

Tsiveh and friends, 1906.

Tsiveh and friends, Rezhitsa, ca. 1906.

Samuel and Chaya, St. Petersburg, 1905.

Samuel, St. Petersburg, 1905.



24 страницы. № 1471

ЗАГРАНИЧНЫЙ

ПАСПОРТЪ

Подпись владѣльца

Unterschrift des Inhabers

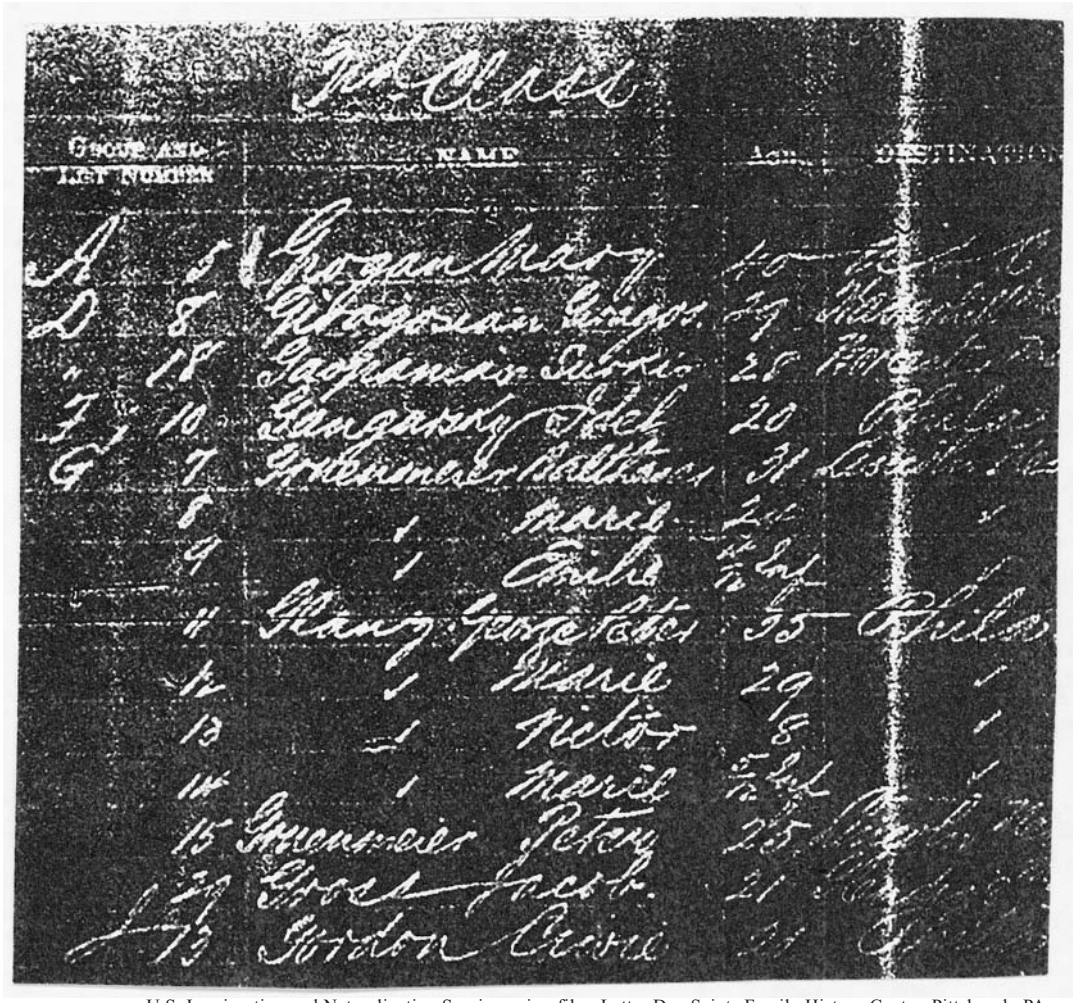
Le porteur du présent bourgeoise

Signatur Zivie Gordin

en foi de quoi ce passeport, confirmé par l'apposition du scellé, est donné pour voyager librement en pays étrangers.

Vitebsk le 31/VIII 1911

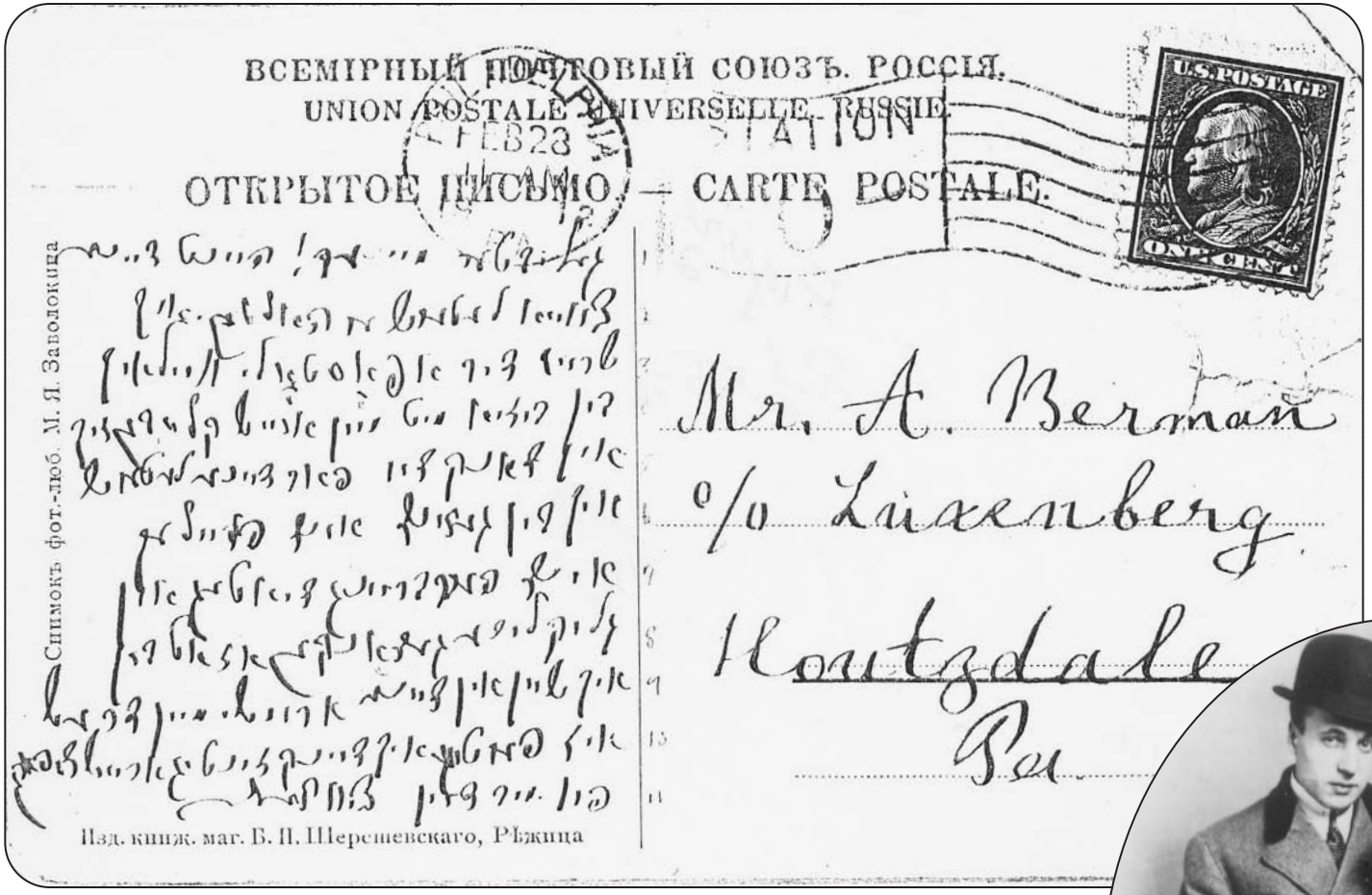
Tsiveh Gordin's Russian passport, Vitebsk, 8/31/1911.



U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, microfilm, Latter Day Saints Family History Center, Pittsburgh, PA

Arrival in Philadelphia of S. S. Haverford, December 5, 1911. Tsiveh Gordin, age 21, (name misspelled) traveling Third Class, number 13 on passenger list.

I sailed. I had a nice black suit on and had a nice little hat. I looked very well in that black suit and I came to the States, and there is where I met Pop.



My beloved! Today your two letters arrived. I'm writing a postcard to you, to say that I am satisfied with the plans for leaving here, and thank you for your letters. I am well and happy now, enjoying this day and the joyful thought that here I am, all ready to be yours, my sadness now ended. I keep thinking, Sunday I leave.

From me, your Tsivkeleh

March 1912

Getting married at Phillip Troop's in Altoona—they had herring and some schnaps and some cake. That was our wedding. I wore a black dress. That's the only dress I had and it was a pretty dress, because I brought material and, in Philadelphia, some dressmaker made me a dress. The only thing, there was a little pink piping. But he was so sophisticated that he didn't care for anything—who cares! A black dress is fine. What girl would ever think of getting married in a black dress?! So that's it.

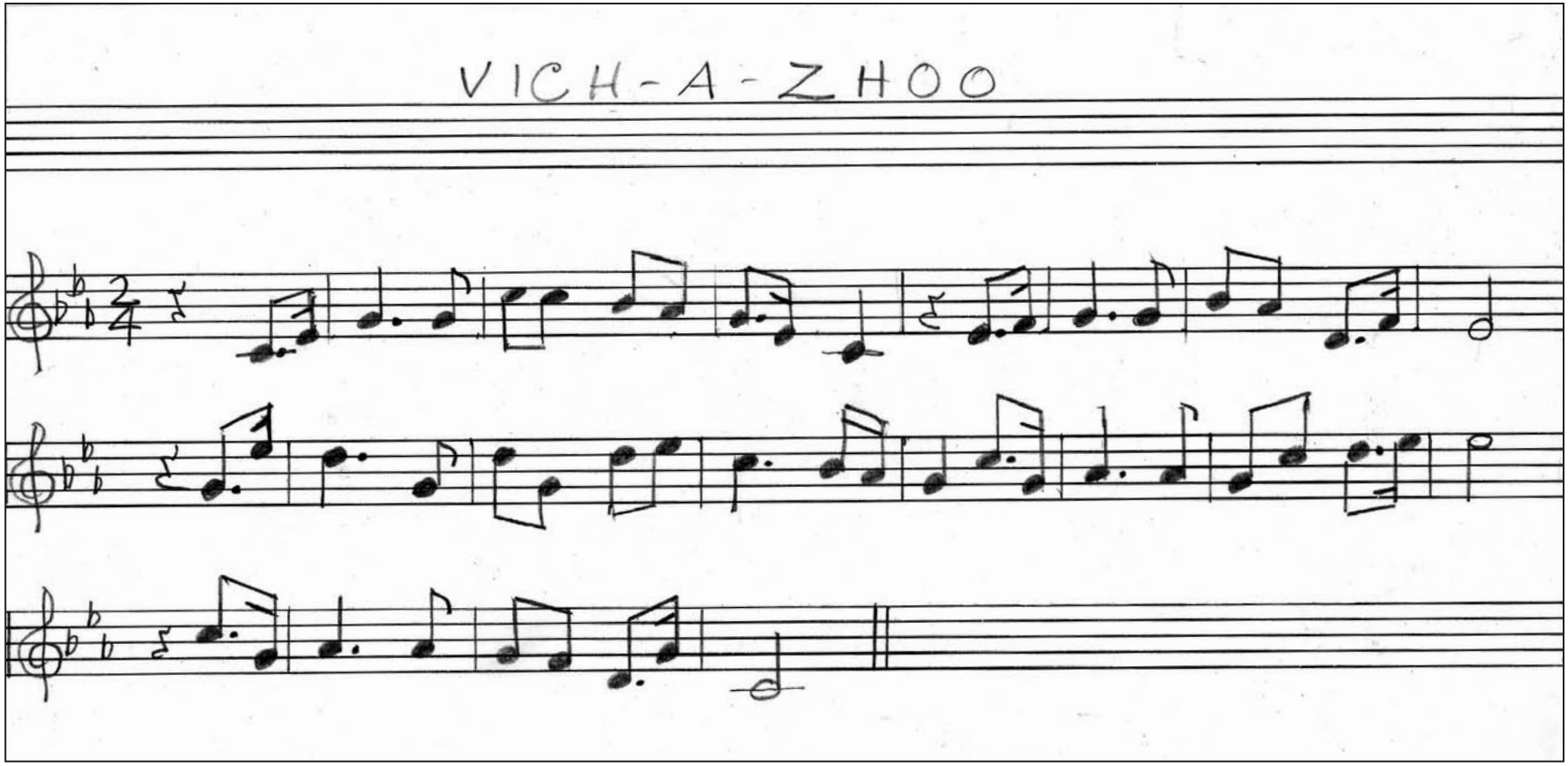
Sylvia, with Emma and Florence. Anna Berman, Abe's sister, standing. 1915

Then we got in the store in Altoona and we thought, we're in business. But there was a big suspension in the railroad shops. See, they organized the whole shop—they called it a lockout. When the shops closed up, there was no business. And yet people were so against the workers. I couldn't understand it. When there was no payday, some of the men donned a white apron and swept the streets.

Pop felt that he has no work. What could he think? We come and we have one baby, and Florence was on the way already and you can't make a living.

So Pop went to the jewelry stores and asked them for work. And they paid him a quarter for what they got, a dollar. You see, so that's the Things started to roll. Then Pop bought another store near the Strand Theater. It was a good store. Papa was a skillful man. He had already one girl to work for him, mind you. And things were good.

I didn't work much in the store. I couldn't. I had children. Papa wanted me, but how could I do it? I used to feel foolish. I couldn't talk. It was hard. And besides this, taking care of the children was important, so he gave it up. He wanted me, he started me on work in the store, but I didn't take to it because I couldn't.



One of Sylvia's favorite lullabies, written down above by her oldest child, Emma, who remembered it exactly.

Michael Kandel, father-in-law of Sylvia's great-granddaughter Eva Zasloff, found the lullaby in a Russian song book (Favorite Russian Folk Songs, "Vykozhu", lyrics by Lermontov, 1989) and provided the transliteration and translation below:

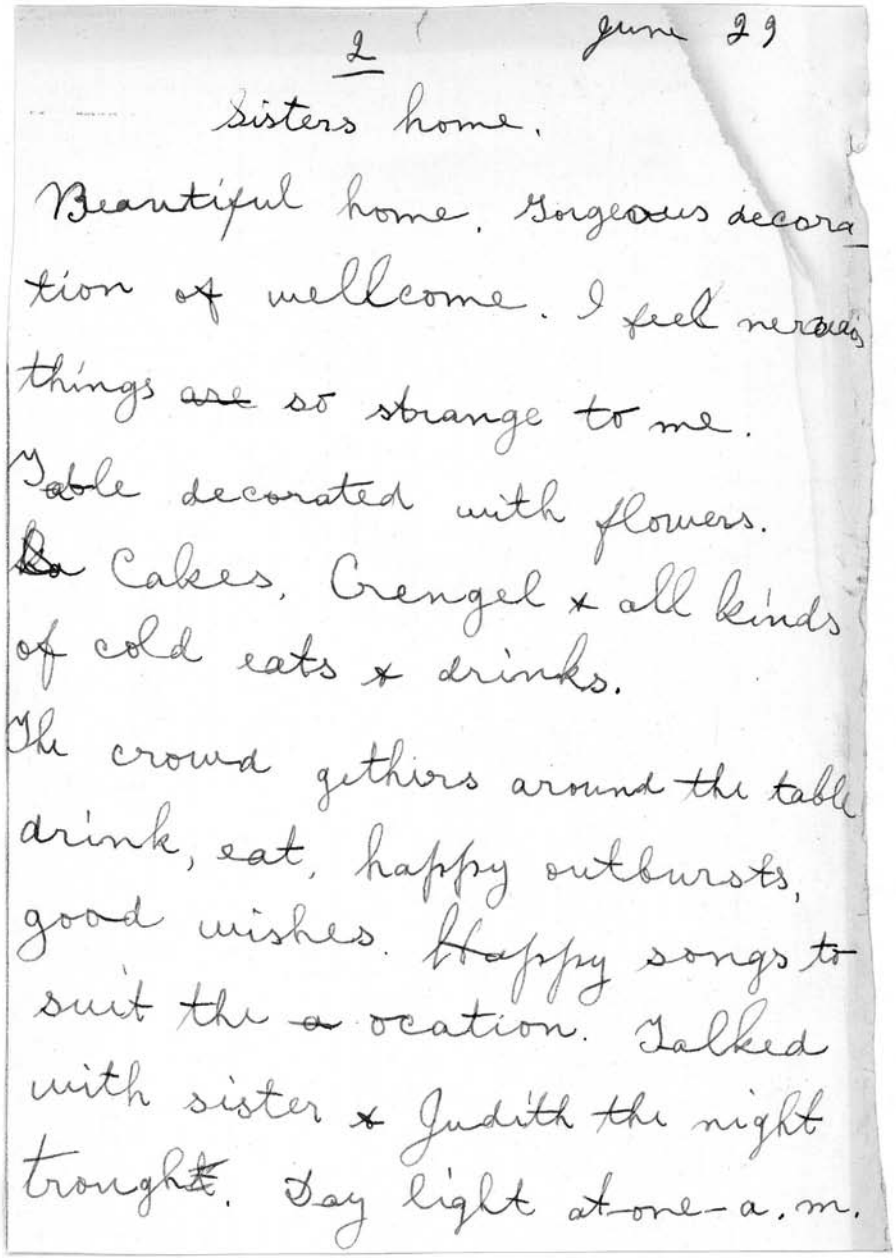
Vykozhu odin ja no dorogu;
Skvoz' tuman kremnisty put' blestit;
Noch' tikha. Pustynya vnemlet bogu,
I zvezda s zvedoju govorit.

I go out alone on the road;
The sandy path gleams through the mist;
The night is still. The wilderness listens to God,
And star talks to star.

The Berman family, Philadelphia, 1925. Abe and Sylvia Berman and their children are underlined in the list below.

Front row, left to right: Fred Broodnow, Bobby Berman, Jordy Rabin
Second row: Jerry Perleman, Marian Rabin, Sidney Broodnow, Belle Berman, Norma Berman, Ruth Perleman, Arnold Berman
Third row: Harry Berman, Anna Berman Waldman, Reba Berman Broodnow, Ethel Metter Berman, Lena Berman Perleman, Edith Berman Rabin, Abe Berman
Fourth row: Bea Perleman, Sy Waldman, Lou Broodnow, Bill Berman, Sam Perleman, Bill Rabin, Sylvia Berman
Fifth row: Naomi Broodnow, Marie Berman (m. Bill Berman), Thelma Perleman, Emma Berman, Florence Berman

(Subsequent additions: Phyllis Broodnow, Harriet Waldman, Birdie Berman, Elaine Berman)



2 June 29

Sisters home.

Beautiful home. Gorgeous decoration of welcome. I feel nervous things ~~are~~ so strange to me. Table decorated with flowers. ~~&~~ Cakes. Crengel + all kinds of cold eats + drinks. The crowd gethers around the table drink, eat, happy outbursts, good wishes. Happy songs to suit the ~~a~~ ocation. Talked with sister + Judith the night trought. Day light at one-a.m.

Photo editor: Lissa Karp Hirsh

June 23 [1934]

Sister's home [Riga]. Beautiful home. Gorgeous decoration of welcome. I feel nervous. Things so strange to me. Table decorated with flowers. Cakes. Crengel and all kinds of cold eats and drinks. The crowd gathers around the table, drink, eat, happy outbursts, good wishes. Happy songs to suit the occasion. Talked with sister and Judith the night through. Day light at one AM.

Photo editor: Lissa Karp Hirsh

Left to right, seated: Josef Gordin, Rachmiel Gordin, Slava Gordin, Sima Fish Gordin, Hendel Gordin.

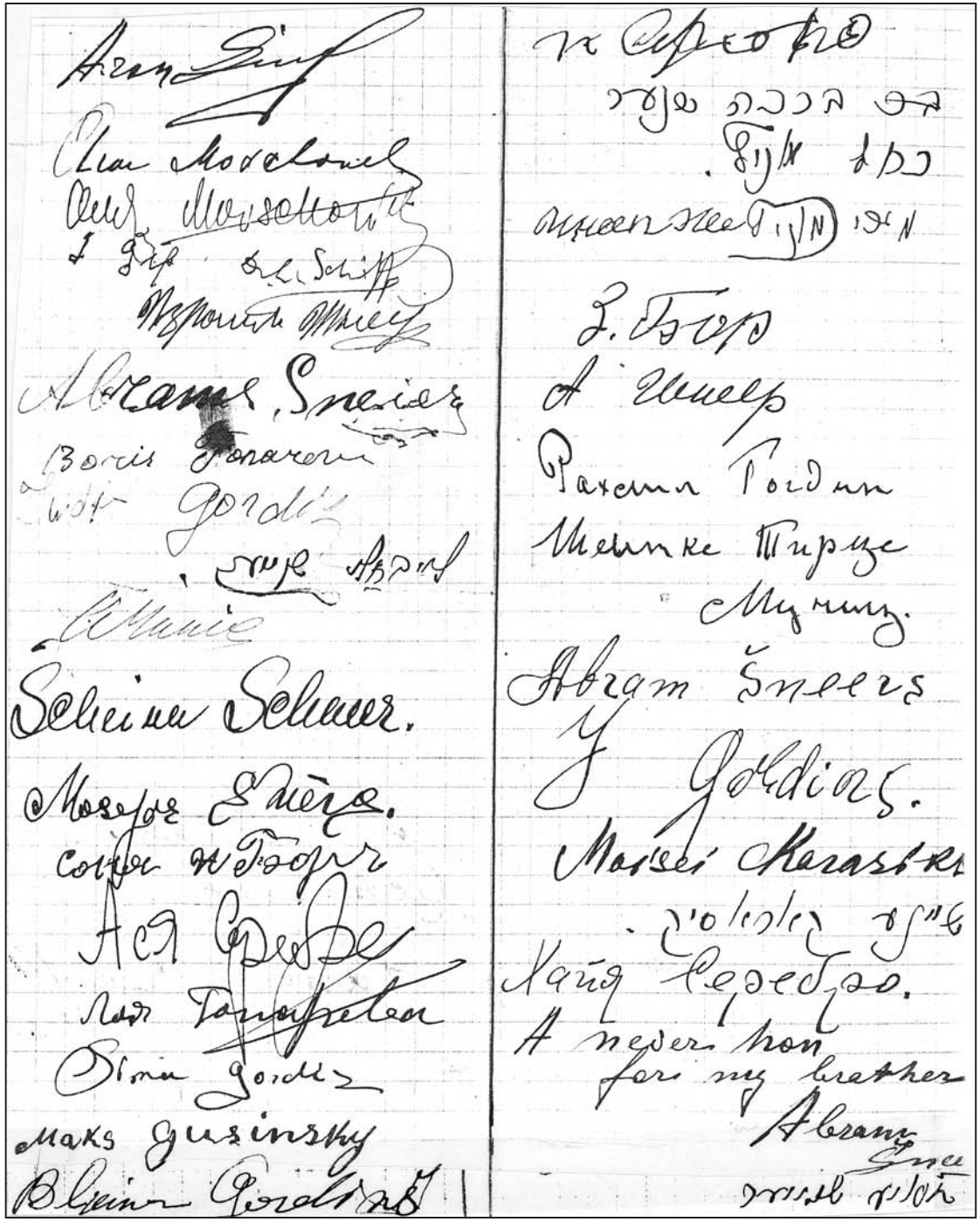
Left to right, standing: Bronya Shneer, Judith Gordin, Shayna's daughter.

Rear: photos of Arnold Berman, Abe Berman and possibly Emma Berman.

Clockwise, seated: Chaya Gordin Shneer, Sylvia Gordin Berman, Tsalel Gordin, Isser Shneer, Shayna ?, husband and son [Family name, not known. Identified as a friend or possibly as the Shayna Shneer who signed the guest list (see next page). Could it be Isser's sister or sister-in-law?]. Note photo of Emma Berman behind Chaya.

Clockwise, standing: Abrasha (Abram) Shneer, Laib Shneer, Aaron Shneer.

"Welcome Tsiveh [or Sylvia?]" (partly in Russian), Shneer home, Riga.



Signatures of friends and family who welcomed Sylvia Berman to Latvia in 1934. (Names written in Yiddish, Russian and English; some not readable):

Left column:	**Right column:**
Aaron (Shneer?)	N. Srosono
? Moschowitz	Brocha Shneer
? Moschowitz	?
? Schiff	?
?	? Bor
Abram Shneer	A. Shneer
Boris Tonarov	Rachmiel Gordin
Judit Gordin	Turze
?	Munilz
?	Abram Shneer
Shayna Shneer	J(Josef?) Gordin
?	Moise Karasik
Sonya Borg	Shayna Karasik
Asya Serebro	Chana Serebro
Lia Gonireten	? for my brother,
Sima Gordin	Abram Shneer
Max Gusinsky	?
Bluma Gordin	

Latvia 1934

Chaya Gordin Shneer and Isser Shneer, Riga

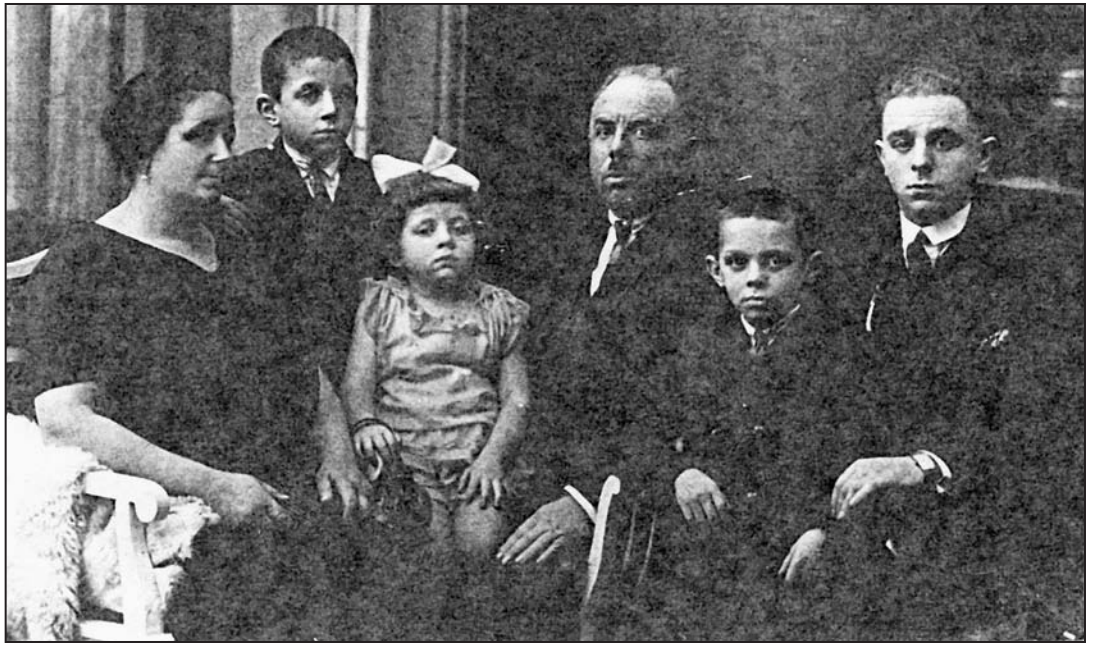
We went swimming in the ocean. The kids think it's great that I can swim. Dinner on the outside around a big round table. No flies. Smell of sunburned needle trees and pine from the nearby woods. White birch trees around us.

Riga beach, with (l. to r

(l. to r.) Aaron Shneer, Bronya, Sylvia, and Chaya

Picking raspberries
with Isser Shneer (l.)
and Laib Shneer (r.)

With (l. to r.) Abrasha Shneer and Aaron Shneer



Shneer family, ca. 1925: (l. to r.) Chaya, Laib, Bronya, Isser, Abrasha, Aaron

Rezekne, 1934

Rezhitsa. The same old burg—quiet and lonely. . . .Brother's house a little primitive, but sweet. Clean white curtains. Great plants on the floor. Table decorated with writing, sayings of welcome, flowers, eats, drinks. The whole crowd around the table sang songs of welcome. . . .Went boating with Aron Gordin. Swimming in the old time place in the very weather as when I was a child. Took a walk with Hendel and Tsalel on the old Wipinga road. Quite a change. Many houses built on road.

Sima Fish Gordin and Rachmiel Gordin

Seated, l. to r.:
Bella Gordin, Hendel Gordin, Sima Fish Gordin, Sylvia Gordin Berman, Doba/Slava Gordin Gefshtayn, Sara Freida Gordin

Standing, l. to r.:
Aron Gordin, Judith Gordin, Mr Gefshtayn

Judith Gordin, 1934

Enjoyed the walk with Judith on Nikolaevk. St. Beautiful new building. New paved streets. New sidewalks. Flowers and flowers everywhere. Took a look at my old little school house across the old lake. The lake is more beautiful than ever. The school house is old and forgotten. The Talmud Torah house is forgotten. . . . Went swimming with Judith. The weather was cold but so refreshing. We started out to the movies. It started to rain. Turned into the Burz girls. Their tea and fresh home-made bulkas take the prize. . . . Potatoes with herring over at Tsalel's. . . .

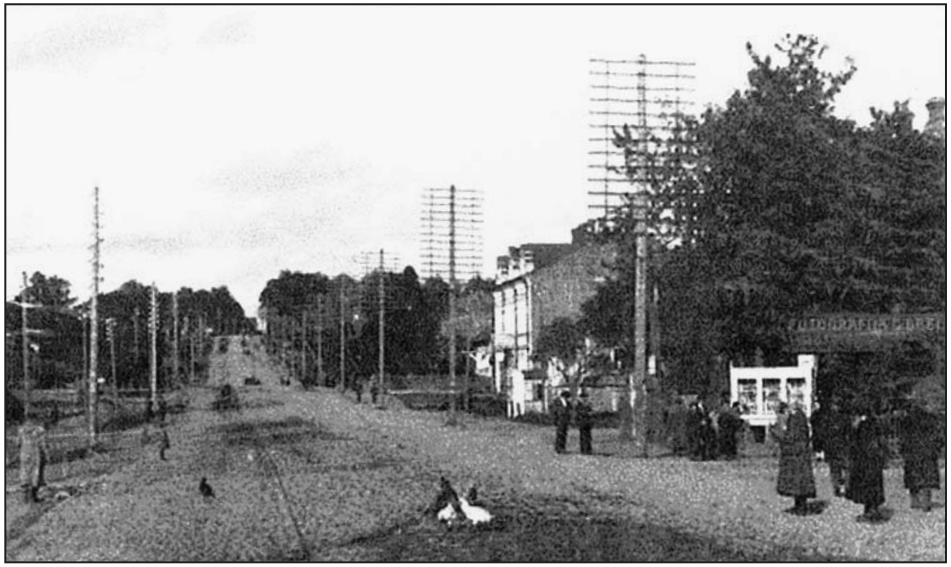
Terrible hot day. The new hospital building and grounds are beautiful. Swimming in the afternoon. Met old friends and had a jolly time. Sara Freida and I sang all kinds of old songs. Herr Gefshtayn came with his violin. Played classic pieces I know. A crowd of boys and girls passed by, singing. Gorgeous night, smell of night flowers. No feeling to go to bed.

Rezekne, 1934

Rezekne, 2000

Rezekne River, 1934

Rezekne River, 2000



Atbrīvošanas Street, 1934

Two more letters from home. What a pleasure! I'm not so lonely for home any more. I took a bunch of relatives to the movies in the afternoon. It rained slowly. In the evening we went to Aron Gordin's girlfriend. Was plenty to eat and drink. Sang all kinds of songs. Was old-fashioned but merry and jolly. I enjoyed it immensely. Went home. It poured rain over our heads. No street lights, no flash light. Tramped in the soft thin mud like nobody's business. I did not mind it at all.

Had supper at Mume Gookels (poor soul). She was so happy that I came. I met a niece of Rachmiel who was a nurse at the Riga Jewish hospital. She is very sweet in appearance and personality. Brother came to take me home. Had a long talk and good laugh with the family. Went to bed late.

Rezekne, Darzu Street, 1934

Rezekne, Darzu Street, 2000

Got up four thirty in the morning. Was afraid to miss the train to Riga. Beautiful morning, watched the sun rise in my native town. What a feeling!! The train left Rezhitsa at six thirty in the morning. The walk to the station was a pleasure. Reached Riga at twelve fifteen. Aaron Shneer came to the station. It felt grand to be back to this blessed sea shore. Chaya was so happy to see me again that she cried (for a change).

Riga

Seated:
Judith Gordin, third from left
Shayna ?, sixth from left
Sylvia, second from right
Chaya, first on right

Standing:
Aaron Shneer, third from right

Abrasha came in and said, "Tante, you want to go to town? Uncle Samuel is going to call from Leningrad!" I didn't feel like going. I could not stand the excitement. Chaya said, it's a shame not to go. So we dressed in a hurry and went. It was thrilling and painful to hear his voice over the telephone. He asked me if I can talk Russian. I said, "Da, da, I can." I thought about it the whole night.

Leningrad, 1934

Gordin family (l. to r.):
Samuel, Fenia, Aaron, Rose

Leningrad, 1934

(l. to r.): Chaya Gordin Shneer, Samuel Gordin, Rose Gordin, Sylvia Gordin Berman

Judith Gordin and family, Rezekne ca. 1935.

Doba/Slava Gordin Gefshtayn and son Isinke, Rezekne 1938.

Aaron Shneer's wedding, ca. 1935

Seated, second from right: Aaron Shneer

Standing: (l. to r.): Hendel Gordin (far l.), Sima Gordin (4th from l.), Chaya Gordin, Sonya Gordin, Rachmiel Gordin, Shayna's husband (3rd from r.), Shayna.

Chaya and Laib Shneer

Bronya Shneer

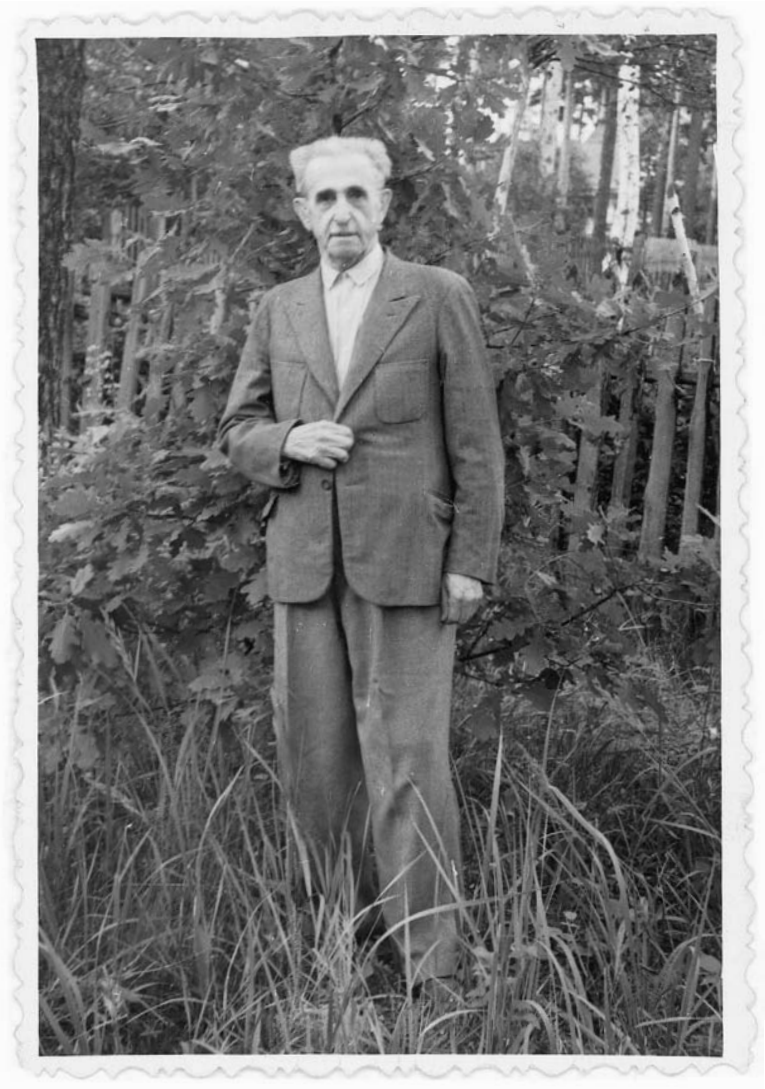
Seated: (2nd from l.) Shayna, Hendel, Sara Freida.

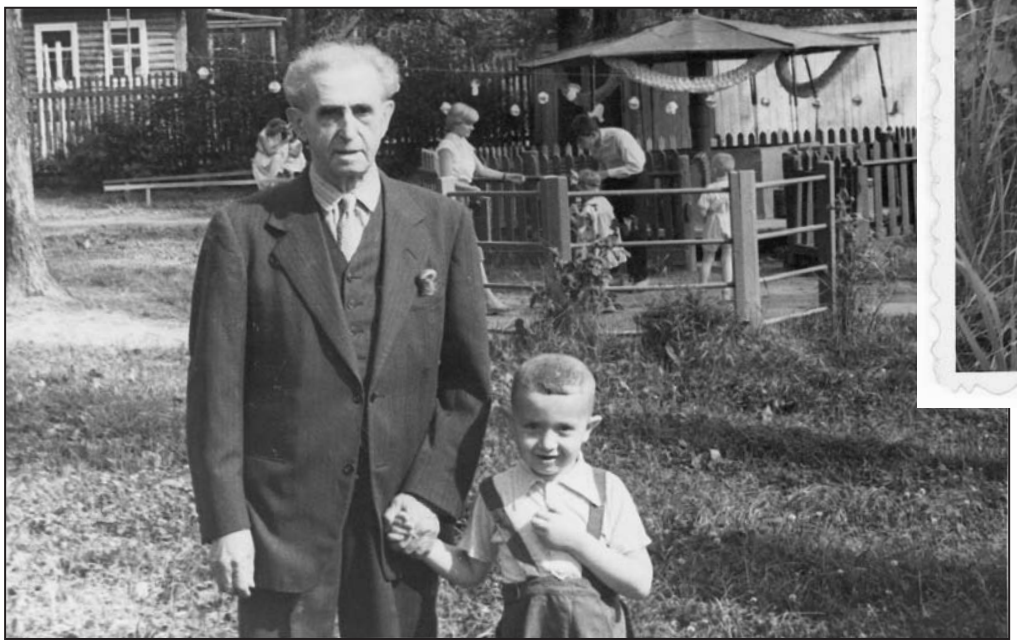
Standing: (2nd from l.) Sima, Rachmiel (4th from l.) Judith Gordin (center), Shayna's husband, Judith's husband, Sonya (3rd from r.), Josef Gordin (far r.).

(l. to r.): ?, Shayna, Shayna's husband, Aaron Shneer, Sima, ?, Rachmiel, ?, Josef Gordin, Sonya.

Samuel Gordin, with
Mira Davidovna
Bodin, granddaughter.
Leningrad, ca. 1937

Samuel Gordin, age 76
Leningrad, ca. 1964





Samuel with great-grandson,
David Strasfogel, Mira's son.
Leningrad, ca. 1964

3003 Third Avenue, Altoona, PA 1940

Front row, l. to r.: Burton (Buzzy) Cohn, Emma Berman Cohn, Abe Berman, Sylvia Gordin Berman, Florence Berman Karp, Diane (Danni) Karp
Back row, l. to r.: Birdie Berman, Belle Berman, Tela Cohn, Hillis (Hilly) Cohn, Arnold Berman, Norman Karp, Reuben (Ruby) Karp

Photo: Michael Adler, great grand-son-in-law. Sylvia Berman's afghans. Berman Family Reunion, 1997.

The living must live and I, too, hope to live. Thank God for my family, for their love and devotion.

Sylvia Gordin Berman,1977

Photo:
Arnold Schulman, son-in-law.
California,
October 1977.