

A Struggle to Survive

Stories of Bunia and Yitzhak Upstein



Written by Shoshana (Upstein) Baruch
translated by Charles Epstein and Howard I. Schwartz, PhD

About the author and translators:

Shoshana Baruch and Charles Epstein are children of Yitzhak and Bunia (Steinberg) Upstein from Mervits, whose story is told here. Howard I. Schwartz is the grandson of Paul Schwartz and Pauline Shulman, first cousins from Mlynov who married in Baltimore.

Bunia Upstein wrote a short summary of her experience that appears in the Mlynov-Muravica Memorial Book, pp. 387-402 a shortened version which can be found in the David Sokolsky translation, pp. 98-100.

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Introduction– "And you shall you tell your child that that day... (Exodus 13.8) "*

As a second-generation daughter of the dreadful Shoah, I felt the need to write and to testify to the struggles of my parents to remain alive.

My parents, Bunia and Yitzhak were born in a small town in Eastern Poland by the name of Mervits-Mlynov. Their lives in the Diaspora were filled with a long, continuous parade of persecutions and wars, hardships and travail.

They arrived in Israel one year after the War of Independence War [1949], and personally experienced the difficult birth pangs of the new state. But they had a strong will to build a Jewish home in the Holy Land, to raise children according to values of the Torah and ethics (Musar), to love humankind and the land. These values gave them the determination and strength to get out from the inferno of the Shoah and withstand all the hardships of reality that were placed in front of them in the early years of the State.

My parents succeeded in bequeathing to the next generation [the belief that] we have no home other than our State and that it is imperative to make every effort to protect her.

Ben Gurion said, "In every man and woman there lies a strong will, but you have to learn to draw near to your [inner] source, to reveal and display it." We saw this in my parents' home and we grew up with these values.

Our parents always reminded us of their past and the hardships they went through, and despite all the searing memories, they succeeded in raising a wonderful family.

We are a generation that saw the realization of prophet Ezekiel's vision, who said. "I open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves as My people, and bring you home to the land of Israel. (Ezekiel 36).**

* Editor's note: This quote from the book of Exodus also appears in the Passover Haggadah and is interpreted there as commanding parents to tell their children the story of the Exodus from Egypt, here metaphorically taken as a symbol of the Shoah. The original biblical verse continues: "It is because of what the LORD did for me when I went free from Egypt."

** Editor's note: Ezekiel 37.12 in some current editions.

Melodies

Fania Bernstein

(translated by Stephen Steinberg, grandson of Getzel Steinberg)

You planted melodies in me, Mother,
Father
Melodies of forgotten hymns
Seeds, seeds adrift, borne by the heart
Now they are sprouting
Now I sense the beacons in my blood
In my arteries, their roots are anchors
My father's melodies and my mother's
verse
Joyous and homeward bound.

Here I will listen to the distant lullaby
I, the daughter, will pass it along

Here I will keep watch for tears and
laughter
Lamentations and psalms of the Sabbath
Day.
Every sound heard, and every fading note.
The distant voices are within me.
When I close my eyes, I am with them.
Above the Darkness of the Deep.

[original page 7]

Chapter One:

Family Roots

“What I once was is now a childhood that has vanished.”

(Yaacov Gilad)

[original page 8]

The Town of Mervits Until the First World War

My parents (may they rest in peace) were born in the small town of Mervits. My mother Bunia Steinberg was born in 1913 and my father Yitzhak Upstein was born in 1910.

Mervits was a town in the district of Volyn along the Ikva and Styr rivers in the Volyn district of Poland; today Mervits is found in the territory of Ukraine.

Jewish settlement in Mervits is mentioned already in 1569¹ under the rule of the nobleman from the Chodkiewicz lineage. The first Jews to settle in Mervits engaged in the belt trade, saddles and spurs. In the period of the [Chmielnicki Evil] decrees (*“gezerot ta ve-tat”*) (1648),² the Jewish settlement contracted, but did not disappear, and began to grow in the beginning of the 18th century. In the 18th century, the numbers of Jews declined again in Mervits and in the 19th century the numbers grew. Jews of Mervits engaged in the cattle business, agricultural products, and petty trade and crafts. Most of the Jewish craftsmen were builders. Until the end of the World War I, Mervits was located in the Pale of Settlement in Russia.³ The Pale of Settlement was the region in which the Russian Tsar regime permitted Jewish settlement, in contrast to the interior of Russia, where Jews were forbidden to settle, and only a few wealthy Jews were permitted to enter. For this reason, there were many Jews concentrated in the Pale of Settlement in the towns, like the town of my parents.

¹ Mervits in the Dubno district, 3-116, <http://www.wolyn.org.li/מרוויץ> [Editor's note: The original url provided did not work, but is found via a Hebrew search and is part of a site called the "World Association Of Wolynian Jews in Israel."]

² The [Evil] decrees of 1648-49 (*“gezerot ta ve-tat”*) (5408-5409 in Jewish calendar) prepared the way for the Chmielnicki pogroms (also spelled Khmelnitzki, Khmelnytsky). The massacre of Jews in what is today Poland, Belarus and Ukraine was done in response to the unification of Poland and Russia, which had the strength to take away land from Ukraine, that belonged to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. In this area dwelled Polish nobles who had established giant estates and imposed tough laws of serfdom on the local farmers. The Jews arrived in the area as tenants and as estate administrators which led to the flowering of the Jewish communities in the area. Under the leadership of Bodgan Chmielnicki, the Cossacks and serfs rebelled against the Polish aristocracy and during the course of the rebellion carried out cruel acts of slaughter against the Jews. Even after the rebellion ended, the slaughtering continued and led to the destruction of many Jewish communities. Wikipedia.

³ The Pale of Settlement *“der tkhum-ha-moyshav”* [in Yiddish] refers to areas that the Russian emperor acquired after the Partition of Poland Lithuania in 1791. In these areas, a large Jewish population resided, in contrast to the interior regions of Russia, which were nearly devoid of Jews. The Russian government forbade the movement of Jewish to the Russian interior. In 1897, about 4.5 million Jews lived in these areas, and they constituted 10% of the population. Most of them lived in cities and towns (*“shtetls”*) in crowded conditions and poverty and made their living from peddling and trade. In 1917, after the Bolshevik revolution, the Pale of Settlement was eliminated. Wikipedia.

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Map of the Pale of Settlement⁴



In Mervits, which was a small town of about 400 people, there was no official institutions such as a post office or local council. Even so it had the atmosphere of a Jewish town. Until the end of the WWI, there were three study halls (batei midrash), a bath house and mikvah [ritual bath], two kosher slaughterers (shochtim), a burial society (hevra kedisha), and a cemetery. There was a market in town and stalls for essential goods gathered and every few weeks there was a fair held there. Trade was the central livelihood of the town's Jews. The population of the town was divided between the Trisk Hasidim, most of whom were among the wealthy of the town, and the Olyker Hasidim, most of whom were numbered among the poor of the town. Between the two Hasidic groups, there was much friction over the style of prayer and other religious matters, which ended only after every one of the group achieved its own synagogue.*

Half of the Jews from Mervits made a living from trade. They were owners of small shops that sold iron, clothing, and merchandise to the town residents and those from the surrounding villages. They also did business in crops and cattle. The other half made a living from seasonal labor in building or small crafts (shoemaking, tailoring) and a small minority worked the land. Local intelligentsia did not exist. The doctor who

⁴ Pale of Settlement map. Wikipedia.

* Editor's note: See the comments by Boruch Meren in the Mlynov-Muravitz Memorial book on this point. He suggests the main synagogue burned down and two groups had a share a building.

served the Jews of the town [original page 10] was in Mlynov and Mervits was only a medical assistant. The educational level in the town was low. The core of study and learning was rigid orthodoxy. In Mlynov, which served as the center for villages in the surrounding area, there was a Tarbut school,⁵ a sport clubhouse, and a Zionist youth movement and the youth of Mervits visited them.

Despite the poverty of the population, weddings, circumcisions (brit-milah), festivals and the sabbaths were celebrated with great joy. Also, there were many charitable organizations, including the tin box for the benefit of the Land of Israel.

In the period of WWI, Mervits was caught in the front line between the Austria-Germany army and the Russian army and was nearly wiped off the map. The town's houses were used by the army for digging ditches and because of that they were destroyed completely. Most of the residents left the town during this period including my parents' families. My mother was three years old and my father was six when they left to wander eastward and only returned to Mervits after many months.

Mervits after WWI

After WWI, the area of Volyn changed hands many times: Simon Petliura,⁶ Boksheviks,⁷ and finally the Poles. In 1920, Polish rule was instituted in Volyn. Poland was an ancient reborn state that was established after WWI.⁸

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After the war, with the return of the residents, the town was lazily rebuilt anew.

Mervits was one-kilometer distance from the town Mlynov. Mlynov almost was untouched by the war and the town's position was strengthened afterward.

Mlynov was the center for the towns in its surrounding: Mervits (1 m NNW), Trubitz (9 m WNW, now Torhovytsia), Ostrozhets (12 m N), Baremel (18 m W), Demydivka (13 m

⁵ Tarbut—a network of Zionist Hebrew schools that operated in Eastern Europe especially in Poland in the period between the two world wars. Wikipedia.

⁶ Peliura—Ukrainian leader and last president of the Ukraine republic, that was established in the period of the civil wars in Russia and which folded shortly thereafter. Wikipedia.

⁷ Bolsheviks—supporters of the Communist Revolution in Russia. They seized the government in Russia after the revolution against the Tzar in the period of WWI. In this period, Ukraine proclaimed independence, but the Ukrainian separatists surrendered to the Red army. The Eastern portion of Ukraine was annexed to Communist Russia, and the western part to Poland. Bucharest was annexed to Rumania.

⁸ Poland was established in the eleventh century under the dynasty of Piasts. At the end of the 18th century, Poland ceased to exist as an independent state, after the aristocracy caused it to be divided between Russia, Austria and Prussia. Since then, the nationalistic Poles worked for the return of state independence and reunification. The goal was realized after WWI, when their national rights of self-determination were recognized. Wikipedia

WSW). * At the head of the Kehilla (local governing body) was the Rabbi Ackerman from Trubitz and the head resident was Joseph Berger.

During the period of the Polish rule, the towns were rehabilitated and the situation improved. The rivalry between the Ukrainians and the Poles made it possible for the Jews to get a business foothold. In Mlynov. there was a flour mill, small clothing shops, and the mainstay was trade in beer, apparently because the German and Czech population that lived in the surrounding villages loved to drink beer. Under the Polish government, the policy began of transferring certain economic branches from Jews to the Catholic Church. The situation gradually became more severe. To the region came Polish settlers who took various economic activities away from the Jews. The more the influence of the Polish Endeks (the national Democrats) grew, the more antisemitism increased. Economic policies with high taxation were implemented, [as well as] the removal of Jews from diverse positions and offices, the prohibition on kosher slaughtering, etc.⁹

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The Upstein and Steinberg Families Between the Two World Wars

And these are the generations of the Upstein family, by the lineages of their ancestors' houses...

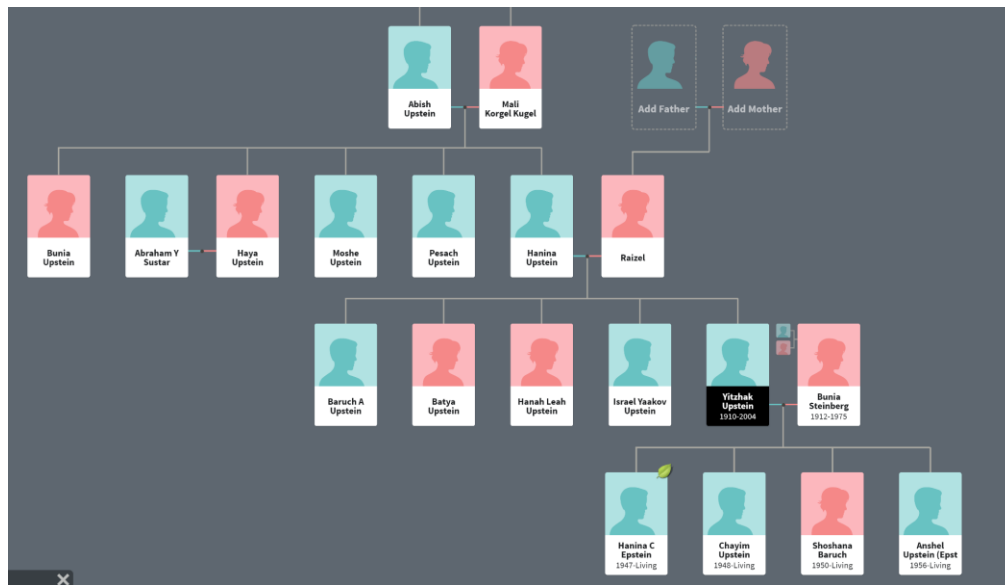


Figure 1 These are the family lines of the Upstein family

* Editor's note: A listing of towns near Mervits is published on JewishGen. See <https://www.jewishgen.org/Communities/Community.php?usbgn=-1056486>

⁹ Sonia and Mendel Teitelman, "Mlynov-Surrounding Villages, from the Mlynov-Muravitz Memorial book. Ed. Yitzhak Siegelman. Translated from the Yiddish by Esther Vinshelbaum, https://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/mlyniv/files/Mlyniv_Hebrew.pdf, pp. 22-28.

The family name of my father, peace be upon him, was Upstein and is enumerated as follows: His father [was] Hanina, his mother, Raizel, and the siblings: Hana Leah, Yitzhak (my father), Batya, Moshe Eliyahu, Baruch Aharon, and Yisrael Yakov. The family returned to the town after the WWI. The patriarch of the family revived a flour store that had been the source of their livelihood before the WWI and the family returned it to its former glory.

The matriarch, Raizel, was a dominant figure and the house was run according to what she directed. My father was born after two daughters and therefore was a pampered son and nicknamed “Itzakel” (for Yitzhak) by the family. Growing up he was a sweet lad, surrounded by male and female friends who spent time [with him] in the Tarbut clubhouse, putting on plays, listening to lectures and singing Zionist songs. My father helped with work in the flour store and learned in yeshiva in Mlynov. As he grew, his parents [original page 13] sent him to advanced yeshiva studies of Rovno, a large town of the district. In Rovno, my father lived with the relatives of the family and studied in yeshiva.



Figure 2 Photo from 1916 of nieces and nephews of father–Gershon and his sisters Feyga and Chava. (Mlynov Memorial Book, 474)

He clowned around during that time. My father Yitzhak would recount that during his studies in cheder [traditional grade school], it would happen that the Rebe would fall asleep while he was reading, and the students seized the opportunity to smear his chair with resin (glue), so that when the Rebe awakened and tried to stand up, behold he was stuck to his chair and was unable to get up. Or another time during [Passover] Seder night, when they came to the section in the Haggadah when you open the door and say

“Pour out your wrath on the nations (“goyim”) who do not know you” (Jer. 10.25), the children hid a goat on the other side of the door and the girls were startled and fainted and a doctor had to be called.

My father was a sociable lad, merry, happy, loved by the youth. Esther from the Fisher family was his closest friend, and they fashioned plans for the future. Zionist ideas impressed themselves on several of the children of his fiancée Esther’s family and they made aliyah to Israel and settled in the kibbutzim Ramat David and Kinneret.

[original page 14]

My mother, peace be upon her, was from the Steinberg family. Her father Asher Anshel, her mother Chava Malcha, and the children: Getzel, Menachem Mendel, Faiga, Bunia (my mother, peace be upon her), Chanan, Tsvi Herschel, and Eliaykim (Yukal). The family returned to the town after the War and built a new home.



Figure 3 My mother Bunia and my grandmother Chaya Malka (Lerner) Steinberg before the Shoah (Mlynov Memorial Book, p. 463)



Figure 4 My uncle Mendel (Steinberg) and his sister Faiga (Steinberg) Shtivel who perished in the Shoah (Mlynov Memorial Book, p. 463)

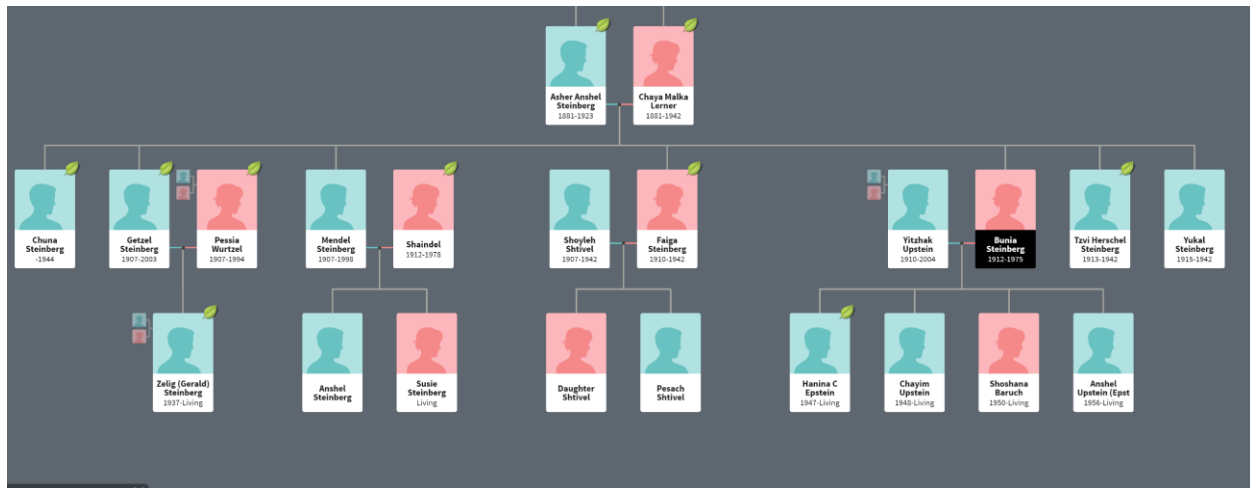


Figure 5 The Steinberg Family

After they settled down anew, my grandfather Anshel (Steinberg) took council with the rabbi about whether to open a butcher shop and the rabbi counseled against it. Despite the advice, my grandfather opened the butcher shop. Things went well and it appeared they would be able to support themselves. The family experienced relief but after a time a terrible disaster struck the family, turning their situation upside down. My grandfather cut his hand and was taken to the hospital in the closest city. In those days there was no antibiotic, my grandfather's wound got infected and he passed away when he was in his forties. The children were not told of the passing of their father, but when they came to take his tallit (prayer shawl) my mother grasped what had happened, began to cry and sob and wouldn't let them take the tallit.

Before her father passed away, my mother visited her grandmother, with her father. Grandmother gave her a bowl of cherries and requested she bring it to her son. My mother said, "Is this for Father?" and she spilled the cherries, angry that grandmother thought only about her son and not about the other children of the family. These two incidents show how discerning my mother was at a very young age.

After the passing of my grandfather, Asher Anshel, my grandmother Chaya was left a widow with seven children.

[original page 15]

After my grandfather died, life didn't return to its normal course. The children had to help carry the burden of the family income. The older brother Getzel began to do business with grain and in the morning my mother Bunia took care of a family of geese and helped with housework. In addition to helping around the house, my mother began studies at public school, registering on her own initiative when only 9 years old. In the beginning they wanted to place her in a lower class, in line with her knowledge, but she resisted and in the end they placed her with her own age group and by her own effort she caught up everything she was lacking. In addition to general studies, my mother studied Hebrew, several times a week in the Tarbut school which was in Mlynov and

when she knew a bit of Hebrew she obtained some [Hebrew] books and was reading them. When she got older, she could also read in Russian and Yiddish. Later in her life, when there were newcomers [in Israel] from Russia, my mother obtained new books in Russian and she refreshed her knowledge in that language.

My mother carried a heavy burden on her small shoulders, and she became an adult at a young age, before she was able to enjoy childhood and adolescence years.

The daughters of the family were independent in their thinking and activities, on their own initiative they went to study and gain knowledge. My mother's sister, Faiga, was also an educated woman in comparison to other women in that era. She studied Hebrew in the Tarbut school from "the lips of Bialik."

In the first years after the death of my grandfather, the family was in an economically bad situation; but after my uncle Getzel took over the business matters, the situation improved and they experienced relief. Getzel married Pesia [Wurtzel] from a respected family.* Near the end of 1938, they had a son they named Zelig [later Gerry Steinberg].

Getzel had a farm in the agricultural environs of Mlynov where he raised wheat and hay, cattle and horses. Getzel in fact had his own family and needed to financially take care of his wife and his son, but he also took care financially of his mother's family. A teacher would come to the family and taught the girls Hebrew and Chumash [the 5 books of Moses]; my mother learned to ride horses, and when she got ill she was sent to recover in the Danube area. She very much loved to travel and she travelled a lot. As she reached marrying age, her mother prepared her a nice dowry, but my mother was in no rush to be married off.

As she became older, my mother managed her mother's household and brought in a number of different innovations. She replaced straw mattresses with modern ones, changed all the bedding to white because she liked the color white; she also acquired a radio, an uncommon item at that time; my mother liked plants and she set up a room for plants in the house.

* [Editor's note: Pesia's parents were Zelig Wurtzel and her mother was Sooreh Gruber, a distant relative of Howard Schwartz who is helping to translate this book.]

[original page 16]



Silver items survived from the house of my grandmother Chaya Steinberg, after they were hidden under a tree in their garden during the Shoah.

[original page 17]

In the 1920s, most of Jewish population was religious and kept the traditions.

During Shabbat, businesses closed and all the Jews of the town, including the women, dressed in Sabbath clothes and spent time in synagogue. In 1921, the first Zionist family from Mlynov emigrated [made aliyah] to the Land of Israel, namely the family of Moshe Fishman, whom they called Moshe Toybes. Toybes was a Jew in the older generation from a respected household, who sold all his belongings, took his wife and his kids and went up to the Land of Israel [Palestine at the time] and settled in Moshav Balfouria.¹⁰ In the 1930s, the intensity of the religious culture became weaker. They started Zionist quorums of prayer [minyanim] and raised charity for the Jewish National Fund (Keren Kayemet), and in the synagogue they listened to Zionist talks. There were [some] rabbis who supported immigration to Israel.

My mother was also influenced by Zionist impulses in the air; when she reached her teenage years, she joined the Betar movement and became active in Zionist activities. My mother's home became a center for social and Zionist activities. The members of the movement came to her house to listen to the radio, and engage in discussions and the house became very active and full of life. In addition to taking care of her household responsibilities, my mother went to speeches of Jabotinsky in Dubno and Rovno, she participated in discussions and debates over the importance of making aliyah to the Land of Israel, and in outings with the youth movement and she hoped she too would be able to fulfill the Zionist idea.



*Figure 6 Residents of Mervits before the war.**

¹⁰ Balfouria– A moshav in the Land of Israel, 3 km from Afula, named for Arthur Balfour, established in 1922, 5 years after the Balfour declaration. Wikipedia.

* Gerry Steinberg indicates this photo is of workers on a gentile farm in the vicinity of Mlynov and some of the workers were Jewish. The man kneeling on the left is Fishel Kleinberg, brother-in-law of Gerry's mother Pesia (Wurtzel) Steinberg and standing next to Fishel is his daughter, name unknown. See Mlynov Memorial Book, p. 429.

[original page 18]

Meanwhile my mother ignored the advice of the matchmakers (“shidukim”), who were the intermediaries for mother or Getzel, and she developed a secret relationship with Samuel, a friend from the youth movement. Every time a young man was proposed for my mother as a match (shiduch), he entered one door and my mother would go out the other door. She intended herself for marriage with Samuel and to make aliyah to Israel.



Figure 7 Bunia with friends from the youth movement (seated second from the right)

From photos from the period before the War, my parents, Bunia and Yitzhak, appear like people of the period. They kept traditional religious commandments (“shomrei mitzvot”), but wore modern dress, girls and boys did things together and even enjoyed couple’s ballroom dancing.

My maternal grandfather, Eliezer [Steinberg], was guardian of the family. Eliezer had no sympathy for the Zionist activities of my mother and wanted her to be arranged to be married to one of the boys of the town. He was strongly against the idea of making aliyah to the land [of Israel] and thought of all my mother’s Zionist activities as a waste of time and stupidity. Even though my mother passed the pressing exams required to receive a certificate (assurance for aliyah to the land of Israel), she was not able to bring [her goal] to fruition, because of grandfather’s opposition and [her sister] Faiga’s need

for help. Faiga got married before the War, had two children and dwelled in in Varkoviche,* with her husband her mother-in-law, and her children. My mother traveled to Varkoviche often to help out her sister.

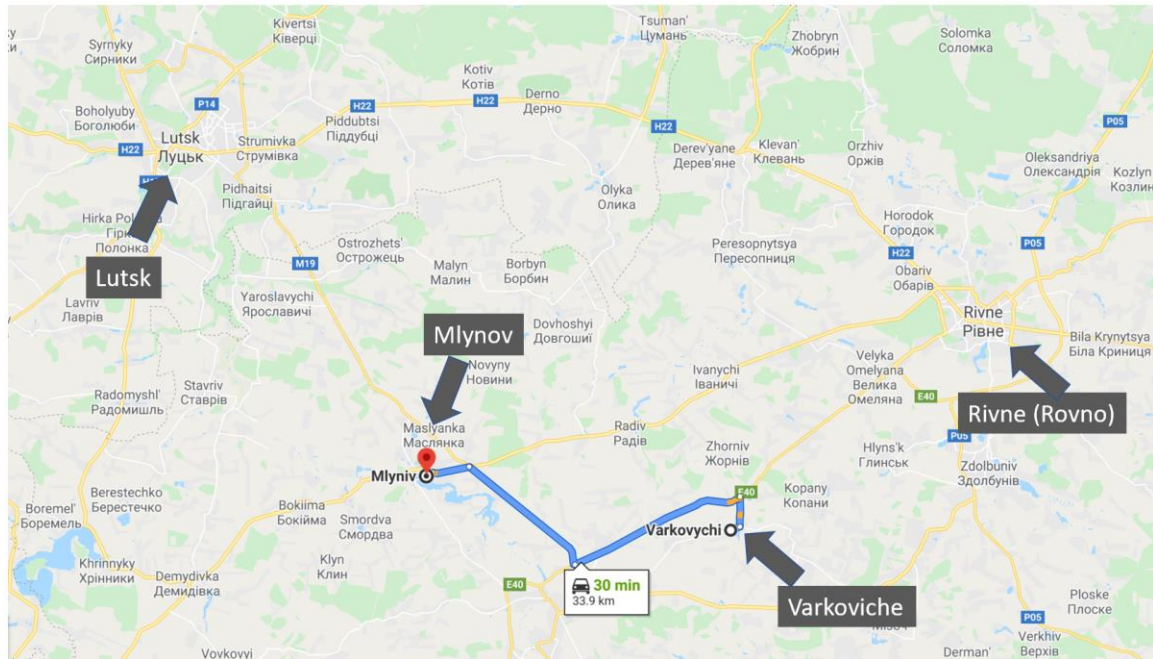


Figure 8 A map showing Varkoviche as a 34 km distance from Mlynov on current maps.

My mother's second brother, Menahem Mendel, fell in love with Sheindel, a girl from a poor and lower-class family, and he wanted to marry her before his older sister Faiga got married. My grandmother was not reconciled to the arrangement because Menchem Mendel wanted bypass Faiga in the marriage order. She therefore was against the marriage and Menahem Mendel got married in secret.

[original page 19]

* Editor's note: <https://www.jewishgen.org/Communities/community.php?usbgn=-1057382>. Vorkovitz likely refers to Varkovychi, Ukraine.

Chapter Two: Bunia and Yitzhak in the WWII Period

From the start of the war until the liquidation
of the Mlynov Ghetto
(September 1939–October 1942)

“The Shoah is like a deep abyss, as we get closer to it, it is impossible to grasp how deep it is. But from a distance, you can see how terrible it was. (Rav Yisrael Meir Low)

[original page 20]

The Fate of Mervits in the period of WWII – under the Soviet occupation (Sept. 17, 1939 – June 22, 1941)

A short time after the outbreak of WWII, Poland was divided between Germany and the Soviet Union.¹¹ The Soviets occupied Volhynia and the communist regime began in all the annexed areas. At first, the area was under a military occupation and in February 1940 was changed to civilian governance. A local village council was nominated for Mlynov; and even though the Jews were 50% of the population, there was only Jewish woman representative (eligible because she was an inmate in a prison).* With the Soviet occupation, the Communist policies of nationalization and collectivism were implemented in the area. In the wake of these policies, the economic situation of the Jewish population, the majority of which were involved in trade, worsened significantly.

Of all the shops, only one was allowed to operate as a government store and to make purchases in it, you had to use coupons which were given only to Soviet officials. Jewish people involved in trade had to organize into cooperatives and work on the Sabbath and Jewish holidays. Only a few young men and women were given low level work in governmental offices. Eighty percent of the population had no means of support. A few young men and women were allowed to work in lower level government offices. 80% of the population were left without a means to support itself.

In this situation, Jews had to survive with stored food that they prepared from before the war, by selling personal items to peasants in exchange for food, and some of them had to take up business in the black market, despite the danger involved in doing so. The Soviets ignored the special economic situation of the Jews, (most of them mom and pop shop owners) and they were declared to be unproductive elements [and] anti-social and they gave them special identity cards that prevented them from going to a new place to obtain knowledge and manufacturing experience.

Social life and culture ceased at that time. The youth movement, charities, and leading communal organizations closed down, along with the schools. The heder schools stopped studying Torah and Hebrew. The “Tarbut” library was closed and all its books were destroyed. Instead a generic community center was opened and they put on meetings with lectures, Communist propaganda movies were projected, and dance parties were held.

¹¹ According to the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact endorsed between Germany and the Soviet Union on the eve of the second World War, the Soviet Union would not attack Germany and in exchange Russia would be able to govern the other half of Poland. A period of time after Germany attacked Poland, the Soviet army invaded Eastern Poland and ruled over the areas that were promised to the Soviet Union. Wikipedia.

* Editor’s note: this woman may have been in prison for being a communist supporter in the past.

[original page 21]

They did not conduct professional training for youth or adults that could assist them in finding work. By the same token, they no longer taught Russian and Ukrainian languages, knowledge of which was needed in order to get an official government position.¹²

I don't know the fate of my mother and father's family was during this time. They did not speak about the Soviet period, because the hardship of that period was minor compared to the Nazi occupation that came afterwards.

My father was mobilized with the Red army even before the war and was released after mandatory service. With outbreak of war, he was called up again, placed in a transport unit and sent to Siberia and worked in Omsk.¹³ There his battalion was working in construction. My father broke his leg, and since medical means were lacking there, they fixed his leg, by putting pieces of wood on either side of his leg; the break did not heal properly and he suffered pain in his leg the rest of his life. My father used to recount the effort that Jewish soldiers in the army made to keep their Jewishness. They always sought out other Jewish soldiers so they could pray in a minyan [quorum needed to pray]; they tried not to eat pork, even though this was the nourishing food that was provided to them. Instead they made do by eating bread and drinking milk or water. They tracked the dates on the Jewish calendar and read the weekly Torah portion in the Torah scroll they had with them. I remember when we were kids and were too lazy to do something, my father would tell us that, during the time he served as a soldier in Russian army when he was thirsty, he used to complain how thirsty he was, but he would not get up to get a drink. His supervisor used to get irritated with him and used to say to him, "Get up and get me a cup of tea." That was father's practice when we were too lazy to do something for ourselves.

During the entire war period, my father was cut off from his family in Mervits. He served in the frozen Siberia and suffered from cold and shortages and didn't know the bitter fate of his family.

During this time, he exchanged letters with his brother and childhood girlfriend Esther Fisher. From their letters, he learned a bit about what was happening in Mervits until the Nazi occupation.

¹² Y. Litvak, "The Mlynov Community During the Russian Occupation," 283-286. In *Mlynov-Muravitz Memorial Book*. Ed. Yitzhak Siegelman. Haifa. 1970.

¹³ Omsk is in southwest Siberia near the border of Kazakhstan. The Trans-Siberia train goes to it, and there is a train station there on way to the far east. In the period of WWII, they established big industrial factories which were moved from Western Russia. Wikipedia.

[original page 22]

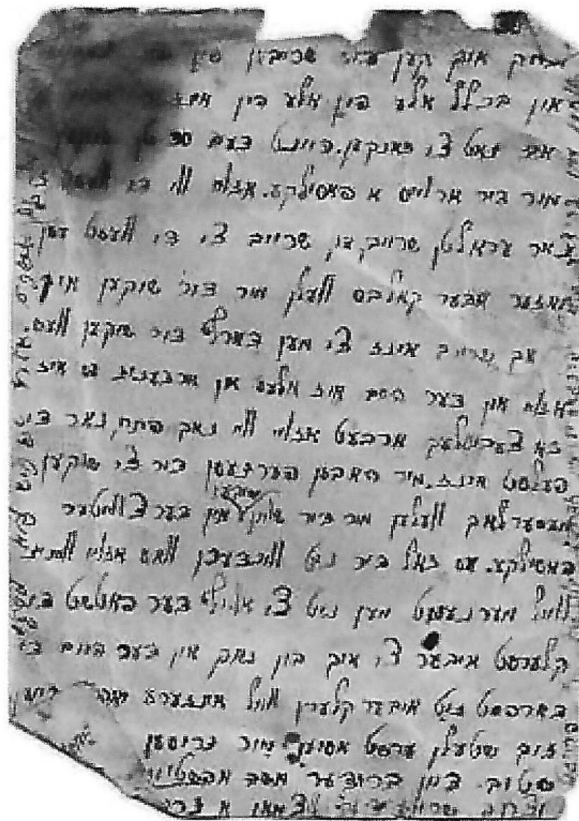
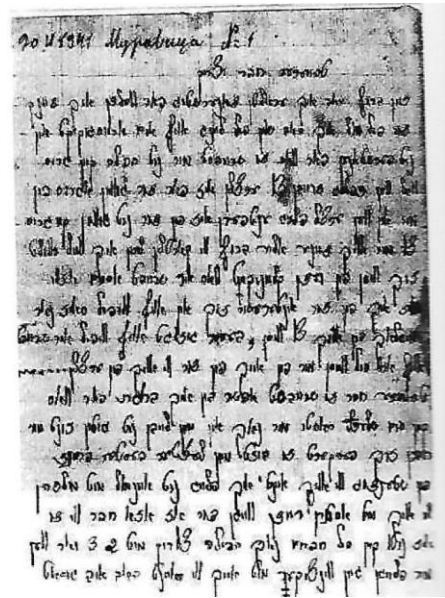
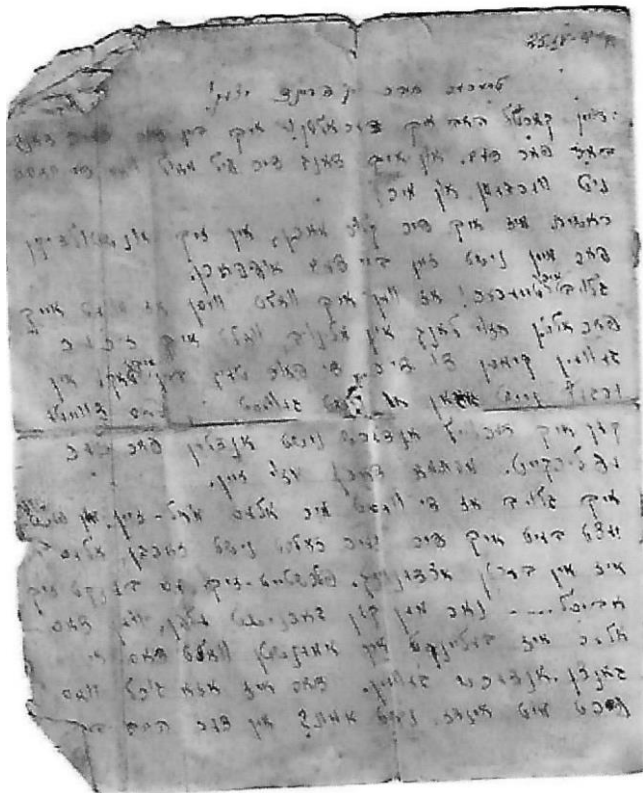


Figure 9 Letter that father received while in Siberia from his brother Moshe in Mervits

[page 23 original]



One of the letters my father received in Siberia from his girlfriend Esther Fisher



[original page 24]

The extended family of my father all perished all in the Shoah. My father was left by himself, “one piece of wood survived from fire” [Zechariah 3.2]. During the War, there was little news about what was occurring in the area that was occupied by Nazis. My father learned the bitter fate that happened to family and people of Mervits only after he came back to town after the War.

Towards end of the War, news reached father concerning the fate of Jews of Volhynia. He deserted from the army and jumped on freight train headed to Ukraine. He made that journey that was said to typically take three weeks in just three days.

The Fate of Mervits during WWII under the Nazi Occupation, June 22, 1941 – end of 1944.

On Sunday June 22, 1941, Germany violated the treaty with Soviet Union and attacked her (Operation Barbarossa).¹⁴ Already during the first day, Mlynov and its surroundings were bombarded. The target was a small airfield located near Mlynov. In the bombardment, a number of people were killed and several houses destroyed. The day following the bombardment, the Soviet soldiers left the town, and on Tuesday, one day after Soviets left, German soldiers entered Mlynov. The Germans arrived in Mervits on Wednesday.

After the occupation, the Nazi SS entered and started to enforce the Nazi policies on the Jewish population.¹⁵

Immediately upon the occupation, Jews were commanded to tie a white band with a blue Star of David (Magen David) on their sleeve. In the fall 1941, they were ordered to switch from the white band to a yellow star on their backs and on their chests. This obligation applied to anyone 12 years old and older.

¹⁴ Operation Barbarossa – the code name that was given by the German army general staff army to the plan against the Soviet Union for its destruction. The goal of the operation was to subdue the Red Army by means of blitz attacks and take control of the general economy and industry. According to the German plan, the operation had to be completed in four months before the arrival of winter of 1941/42. Wikipedia.

¹⁵ After the invasion of the area [occupied by] the Soviet Union, the Nazis implemented the methodical destruction of the Jewish population in the territories they occupied. The destruction was carried out by special paramilitary units, “Einsatzgruppen,” that were designated for that purpose. These units were assisted often by other German units – the Wehrmacht as well as the local Ukrainian population. Wikipedia.

[original page 25]

My mother and her family in the beginning of the Nazi occupation (until the establishment of the ghetto)



Figure 11 My mother during her youth before the Shoah

The terrible trouble started on the Sabbath. Following rumors that the Nazi Gestapo attack only men but not women, my mothers' brothers went and hid in an orchard and my mother stayed alone in the house.

Suddenly, the Nazis broke into the house and began to cruelly beat her with rubber clubs. They found the males hiding in the orchard and beat them too, without mercy, and afterwards took the family out into the street. Thus, they went from house to house, beating them and taking those hiding in the houses out to the streets. While my mother was standing in the street, she saw the Nazis cruelly beating her mother even as she was bleeding.

My mother ran to protect her, but she was shoved back into line by the Nazis. The Nazis forced everyone standing in the street to run to the neighboring Mlynov and had them stand alongside the post office, which the Gestapo had made their headquarters. The men with beards were taken from the line; their beards were cruelly

sheered and they were beaten without mercy. Afterwards, everyone was ordered to perform exercise drills: [repeatedly being ordered] stand up, sit down.

When the Nazis finished their abuse, the men were ordered to gather up the items that the Russians had left behind when they fled the town and pile up all the dead Russians they had killed during the bombardment. After that, they were permitted to go back to their houses. Beaten, hurting and humiliated, my mother and her siblings went back to their house in Mervits. On their way back, the children cried over their bitter fate and on the next day they reported to the Gestapo soldiers for work, equipped with tools to work and clean, as they were ordered.

The policy of severe punishment continued even after the Jews reported for work. A Gestapo man who had been riding a motorcycle damaged telephone wires that were stretched above the town plaza and he continued on his way, as if nothing happened, and did not report it to the authorities. When the mishap was discovered, the Gestapo concluded it was an act of sabotage by the Jews. Punishment fell on a group of teenagers from Mervits who were working there. They were ordered to dig a large pit; the Gestapo lined them up along the edge of the pit and shot them one by one. Among

the dead were three sons from one family and also Shmuel, my mother's boyfriend of five years, whom she had planned to marry. This was the 17th of Tammuz 5701 (November 7, 1941) and these were the first ten [original page 26] official victims of the town.

On the way back to Mervits, those who survived cried over the dead and when the mothers of the fallen found out what happened to their sons, their wailing voices and cries arose from the houses of the town. The mothers of the dead boys hurried to the pit to weep over their precious ones. The sound of their crying and bitter wailing reached the Nazis and they sent a messenger to notify them that if they did not immediately stop the wailing all the Jews from Mervits would be taken out to be killed. The mourners returned silently to their houses and cried silently over their sons.

My mother worked in Mlynov in the flour shop. One day the workers were asked, "Who among you knows how to speak German?" My mother and both her sister-in-laws announced that they spoke German and they were transferred to work in the military hospital that had been set up in the town. My mother worked there cleaning and sustained beatings by her superiors. Periodically, she was ordered to polish the German officers' boots. One of them was not happy with the work, and she was lashed with a whip so that she would improve. The harder my mother tried to polish the boots, the officer [nonetheless] remained dissatisfied and continued to beat her. There were also some officers who treated her nicely. Periodically, when there was a need to translate from German to Ukrainian, she was called upon to translate. After 6 weeks, the hospital moved to another location.

My mother and sister-in-laws were compelled to find work in a different location. To my mother's good fortune, before the hospital moved, one of the officers gave her a certificate and recommendation from the hospital. This document gave my mother self-confidence and later the ability to go in and out of the ghetto.

During the winter of 1941–42 (Hebrew calendar 5702), my mother and her sister-in-laws were holed up in the house and prepared themselves for what was to come. Getzel and Mendel continued to establish business ties in different ways with the non-Jewish Poles and Ukrainians, with whom they had previously done business.

In the spring of 1942 (5702), my mother and both of her brothers, Yukal and Herschel, presented themselves at the courtyard of the Count Hefritz Vaskah Paluk Nikolev, with whom they had done business before the war and asked to work in his fields. The squire agreed and sent them to the village Pavredov* to pick potatoes and beets. Other Jews worked in his fields.

* Editor's note: I have been unable to identify this town.

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In the Ghetto of Mlynov

In April 1942, the streets of Dovinska and Shekolna streets were surrounded by a barb wire fence. The area was surrounded by a wire fence which marked the borders of the ghetto and the compound established by these streets of the town. On May 22, 1942, all the Jews of Mlynov and surrounding villages including Mervits were told to gather a few of their belongings and move into the ghetto. On the first day of Shavuot, my mother her mother, and her brothers moved into the ghetto. They were permitted to take only personal belongings. Faiga and her family, her husband Falek and two children were wiped out in the Varkoviche ghetto, that was established in a village near Varkoviche.¹⁶ My mother had no connection with her since the German occupation and found out about what happened to her sister only after the war.



Figure 12 A towel that my grandmother Chaya embroidered, which was preserved by my mother in the ghetto.

In the entrance to ghetto, the Nazis searched the belongings of the Jews and looted many things they brought with them: potatoes, oil, flour, and clothing. A search was also carried out on my mother and when they wanted to search her belongings, she resisted. Luckily for her, Hungarian* soldiers were the ones who searched her. They left her alone and she was able to bring all her belongings into the ghetto.

¹⁶ Hungary joined Germany during WWII. In Operation Barbarossa, Hungarian soldiers were fighting alongside Russian soldiers. During the war against the Soviet Union, 50,000 Hungarian soldiers participated. Wikipedia

* Editor's note: Varkoviche likely refers to present day Varkovychi, Ukraine. See <https://www.jewishgen.org/Communities/community.php?usbgn=-1057382>

[original page 28]



Figure 14 In the ghetto of Mlynov

Before going into the ghetto, my mother, her mother and her sister-in-laws sewed gold coins in their clothing; these coins were critical to the families at a later period when they were looking for places to hide in the homes of Jews.

In the ghetto my mother and her mother lived in one room and Getzel's family in the next. The Judenrat lived in the same building and Getzel had a position in Judenrat.¹⁷ Mendel Steinberg, my mother's brother, and his wife Sheindel, and their

young son Anshel also entered the ghetto [even though] they lived in a different location. My mother and her brothers were among the lucky ones because they were working in fields outside the ghetto. They were provided travel documents and on the Sabbath days they would return to the ghetto. Mendel work also outside the ghetto in a place called "M.T.S".

In the Mlynov ghetto, a friendship developed between my mother and Neli Feldman. She was a relative of Pesie (Wurtzel),* her sister-in-law. Neli was the daughter of well-to-do family and had nice clothes and there was a demand for them among the Polish and Ukrainian people in the nearby villages. Neli asked my mother, who was allowed to come and go out of the ghetto, to exchange her clothes for food items for food and my mother did so. My mother was courageous to take products in and out of the ghetto, which made a good impression on Neli and even though there was a big age difference between them, they became close friends.

Apparently, the income my mother and her brothers earned outside the ghetto and the food products they were able to bring with them from the place they worked, was sufficient to sustain their families. Getzel continued his business ties with Poles and Ukrainians during the ghetto period. It does not appear they suffered hunger, and on the contrary, my grandmother and Sheindel (wife of brother Mendel) used use to cook all kinds of food and distribute them in the ghetto.

¹⁷ The Judenrat—a council of Jews. Such a council was established in every Jewish community. Their role was to mediate between Nazi governance and the Jews and to see to it that the Nazi orders were executed.

* Editor's note: Pesia Wurtzel was the daughter of Zelig Wurtzel and Sura Gruber.

In July and August 1942, rumors circulated that ghettos were being liquidated in other towns and locations. In September, it was learned that local farmers had been given an order to dig a large ditch in the valley Krozcheck between Mlynov and Mervits.¹⁸

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Getzel heard that these ditches were for the storage of potatoes, but it quickly became clear that they were intended as graves for ghetto residents.

When the rumors of the ghetto liquidation reached Mendel, he went to a Christian man by the name of Andrei Kravitz, with whom he used to do business before the war and asked him to hide him and his family, in exchange for a lot of money. The gentile agreed and Mendel sent a [horse] and cart to the ghetto get his wife and son out before the liquidation. Similarly, Getzel got his wife and son out of the ghetto and joined them much later.

The Judenrat of Mlynov bribed the Ukrainians, who worked in the service of the Nazis, to inform them of the liquidation plans for the Jews and the time set for the liquidation of the ghetto. One evening, the Ukrainians showed up and announced that the slaughter was expected to happen on the coming night. They also announced they would leave the gates of ghetto open and whoever wanted to flee could do so. The Jews of the ghetto sought hiding places in which to hide. My mother took her mother to her grandmother's which had a big orchard surrounding it and which was close to the fence of the ghetto. My mother and her mother hid among the trees of the orchard, with the intention of jumping over the fence if they perceived that danger materialized. That night they lay down between the trees but nothing happened. They realized that the Ukrainians making fun of them. The Ukrainians wanted to see the cowardly Jews run away. In the morning, they all returned to their houses. My mother and her brothers continued to work in the Count's farm.

The holidays of the month of Tishrei arrived in September 1942 (Jewish year 5703). On Rosh Hashanah, my mother worked in the field, but the next day which was a Sunday she returned to her mother's house in the ghetto. She was also home on Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) and Sukkot (Tabernacles). The day after Sukkot my mother and her brothers went back to the fields to work, and their mother remained alone in ghetto. Those were the last high holidays [literally holidays of Tishrei] that the family was together. On the second intermediate days of Sukkot ("chol hamoed"), grandmother appeared suddenly in the field, extremely frightened. "Mother, what happened? Why did you come?" asked my mother. "My daughter, they are digging ditches for us," she answered. My mother's mother said she was in the middle of making challah for the holiday of Hoshana Rabba, when the news reached her of the pending disaster. She dropped everything and ran to tell her kids the awful news. In the evening my mother

¹⁸ Testimony of Yehudit (Mandelkern) Rudolf, Mlynov-Murvica Memorial Book, p. 192. [Editor's note: this appears on page 287 in the editor's version].

headed towards the ghetto, but did not enter. Instead, she slept in Mervits at the home of a gentile and in the morning went into ghetto. As she entered the ghetto, many asked her with astonishment, “Why did you come back? You were outside the ghetto and you could have survived and now your fate [original page 30] is sealed.”

Actually, before the liquidation all the Jews were ordered back to the ghetto. “Obviously, it was decreed that I should be included in what befell all of them. And what would happen to all of them should also happen to me,” retorted my mother. As she reached home, the news arrived of those killed. Whoever wanted to leave the ghetto were shot. Among the dead were two sons of Teitelman, a friend of the family from Mervits. My mother immediately began baking, in case it was possible to flee they could take provisions with them. There was tension in the air; she packed up what she baked and the remainder of the dough she threw into oven so that the Ukrainians who would come to plunder would not enjoy the baked goods left by the Jews.

Suddenly, the order came: “All Jews come out to the open field. Men and women separate.”¹⁹

My mother, with a bag of baked goods in hand, went out and stood with everyone. The scene was terrible. The people, possessed by fear and shaking, were looking this way and that and didn’t know how to save themselves. Suddenly, my mother felt someone touching her back. It was an old Jew by the name of Hetskel Liber, who said, “Bunia, you have papers that allow you to leave the ghetto. Act like you don’t know anything and try to leave. If they question you, show them your documents.”

My mother realized that it was good advice. Her mother and her brothers had already fled outside the ghetto and found a hiding place, while my mother felt that if it is her lot to die, it would be preferable to seeing how the others were killed.

My mother decided not to wait, but to head to the gate. That way she would avoid the expected pain and shaking that would happen when she saw the death of the others. She put on a yellow sweater; on the sweater were sewn two yellow Stars of David (“magen david”), that the law obligated every Jew to attach. My mother was hoping that they would not see them against the backdrop of the yellow sweater. On her head she put a headscarf and she draped her shoes on her shoulder, like the custom of young Ukrainian girls and she headed towards the exit of the ghetto. The Ukrainian and German guards did not realize she was a Jew and permitted her to leave without bothering her. According to my mother, God blinded their eyes, and perhaps thought she was a shiksa (gentile woman) that by chance happened to be in that place.

¹⁹ On the 9th of October, 1942, liquidation “actions” were carried out in the ghetto of Mlynov. All the residents were shot dead along the ditches. The Germans and Ukrainians organized a manhunt for Jews who succeeded in hiding in the surrounding areas. Sixty-six Jews were found and also murdered. Only a few were able to survive. Mlynov–Wikipedia.

[original page 31]

Chapter Three: Life In Flight

God gave you a present, a large and wonderful gift. As a present, God gave you life upon the earth.”

(David Halphone)

[original page 32]

Searching for hiding places

That is the way my mother got out of the ghetto. As she came to a bridge outside Mlynov, she met a man who brought her into his wagon. To his question, where was she headed, she replied that she wanted to get to her working location in Pabrodov.* The coachman advised my mother to travel with him to Smordov**, which was closer, because everywhere they were digging pits for Jews and shooting them. My mother stood firm in her intention to go to Pabrodov, because her mother and her brothers, Yukal and Herschel, were hiding there and waiting for her.

When the coachman saw her intransigence, he gave her a ride to Pabrodov. In Pabrodov, my mother met her mother and her brother; they were waiting for nightfall in order to continue to Dobrotyn,*** the prior hiding place they had arranged by paying the farmer who was willing to hide them

That night, my mother and Yukal headed towards Dobrotyn. The brothers Herschel and Getzel stayed in Pabrodov, because they had their (paid) hiding places there. Their mother also remained in Pabardov because to get to Dobrotyn, you had to swim across a river and she didn't know how to swim. It was decided for the best of everyone, better to leave their mother in Pabardov for the time being and check out the hiding place in Dobrotyn.

My mother and Yudal tied up their clothing in a bundle, put them on their head and swam across the river. In reaching the other shore, they put on their clothes and went to the house of the gentile who was supposed to hide them. The gentile prepared for them a place inside a stack of hay and they crawled into it and fell asleep. The following morning Yukal went back to Pabrodov to get their mother.

Going by dry land from Pabrodov to Dobrotyn was longer than the way that crossed the river. Yukal had to rent a wagon and travel with his mother, in a circuitous way, an additional 15 kilometer in distance. Only on the evening of Simhat Torah did they arrived in Dobrotyn, and immediately the next day they got informed by the gentile who hid them that they must leave. He was afraid that he would be found hiding Jews. The hardships of the prior few days, left mother very weak. When my mother arrived at the hiding place in Dobrotyn, she almost couldn't recognize her own mother, because she looked like a former shadow of herself. In light of the bad news, it was clear that it was necessary to return their mother to Pabrodov and seek out new hiding places. Yukal returned her to Pabrodov and then returned to Dobrotyn. It is not known how and where my grandmother died; from the time they separated at Dobrotyn, they did not see each other again.

* Editor's note: likely Pereverediv, Ukraine today,

**Likely Smordva, Ukraine today.

***Likely Dobryatyn, Ukraine today.

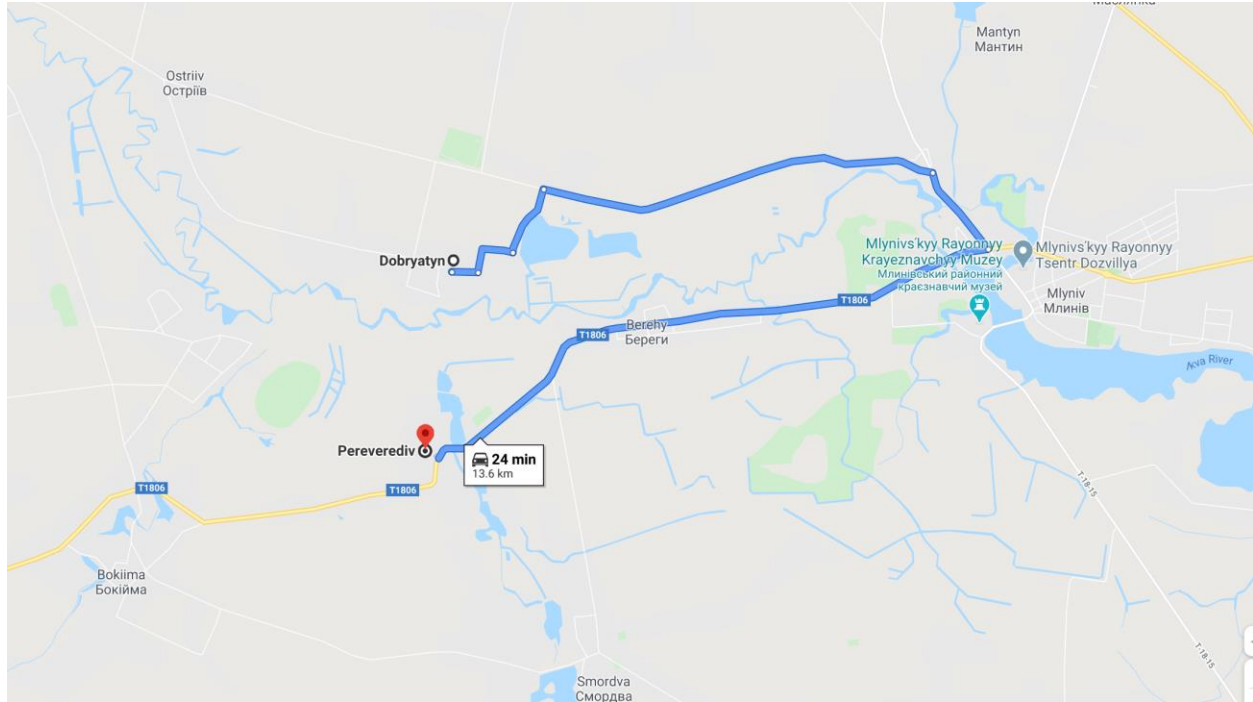


Figure 15 A contemporary map showing the circuitous driving distance from Perevediv to Dobryatyn that circumvents the Ikva River that Yukal and Bunia swam across to get from Perevediv to Dobryatyn.

As previously mentioned, Getzel, another brother of my mother, was hiding in Dobrotyn. Getzel and his wife Pesia and his four-year-old son, Zelig [the Yiddish name of Gerry], were hiding at another gentile family. This was a different family than the one with whom my mother and Yukal were hiding. During the night everyone had to leave Dobrotyn and look for a new hiding place.

[original page 33]

Getzel had business ties before the War with many gentiles and he tried to find a hiding place with one of them. In the village Pintzska-Dolina* he found Ritzvuyuk, a rich gentile with a good heart. Ritzvuyuk agreed to hide Getzel and his family in the loft of a granary and my mother joined them without informing Ritzvuyuk. Every evening Ritzvuyuk brought food for three people up to them. When he brought the food up to the loft of the granary, my mother was covered with straw so Ritzvuyuk wouldn't know she was there, because the deal with him did not include a fourth person. A few days before the final liquidation of the ghetto, my mother's brother Yukal came to visit my mother and Getzel at their hiding place in Pintzska -Dolina, and even he was invited to stay in their hiding place but he refused because he had a hiding place by the Count Iska Paluk with another 20 Jews. Ritzvuyuk hid Getzel and his family several days until the ghetto liquidation when most of the Jews were taken out to be terminated in the killing pits. This was Friday, October 9th, 1942 (the 28th of Tishrei, 5703), one week after the

* Editor's note: the village identification is uncertain but perhaps could be Viinytsya which is 12 miles past Perevediv near Bokiima.

holiday of Hoshana Rabbah (the holiday of Sukkot). This day was a holiday for the gentiles; from all the places in the vicinity of Mlynov, they flowed in to watch the killing of the ghetto Jews.

Evonne, the son-in-law of Ritzvuyuk, who was also a very decent man and knew Getzel from before the war, told them that along the way while he was driving that very day to Mlynov he saw Herschel, my mother's brother, who had been hiding in a cellar in the ghetto, being brought to the killing pits. The two of them exchanged greetings like old acquaintances, as if they were meeting under routine circumstances.

Shabbat morning, the day after the killing, guests arrived at the home of Ritzvuyuk. They gleefully recounted their experiences from the day before, and they described with mirth the sight seen with their own eyes: "One lying with feet up and one with feet down." They were amused and related to the terrible events as if they were talking about shooting ducks.

My mother, her brothers, and sisters-in law, who were lying in the loft of the granary heard the stories and the laughing, but couldn't dare to even gasp lest they would be caught and their fate would be like the other Jews.

The following day, on Sunday, the daughter of Ritzvuyuk came to the loft, and told Getzel they couldn't hide there anymore. In the sermon at the church that Sunday the priest said that whoever is found hiding Jews would be shot with them. Ritzvuyuk's family didn't want to risk the danger.

There were a few gentiles who wept over the fate of the Jews, but most were happy about their misfortune.

(original page 34)

A similar fate faced Mendel and his family, who had found a hiding place in the field of Biktah Afar in the field of a gentile named Kravitz. They also were asked to leave their hiding place after a couple days, because Andrei Kravitz was afraid they would shoot him along with the Jews.

Getzel and Mendl were involved before the war in the grain business. They bought seeds from the Poles and Ukrainians and would grind them in the grinding stations, that they or other Jews owned. These business relationships in certain cases became friendships, which served them during the time they needed to find hiding places in the villages. But their non-Jewish friends also didn't want to endanger their lives and that of their families by hiding Jews for any length of time. In the villages, the number of people who would snitch on you and who hated the Jews were many and their friends were afraid of being ratted out.

Wanderings

With no other option, my mother [Bunia], Pesia, and Getzel with his son in his arms, left

to find a new hiding place. Thus they walked in the rain, all the evening and night. They stopped at several gentiles' homes, but not one was willing to let them hid.

At daybreak, my mother, Pesia, and Zelig were exhausted from the walking all night in the rain. They stopped to rest in a dirt hovel of a gentile; Getzel alone continued the search. Exhaustion permeated the women and child. They slept and spent the night and the following day in the dirt hovel. In retrospect, it became clear that in the home of this gentile, in whose hovel my mother and sister-in-law were hiding, there were fifteen other Jews hiding, including family members of Pesia: Sarulik Versal [Wurtzel], Pesia's brother, his wife Eta, and three children: Peteh, Leah, and Zelig. A second family was Freida, the sister of Eta, Pesach Litzman, her son-in-law, Neyta Richman and his children – Memzi, Beracha and Mordechai. At that time, they also didn't know the whereabouts of my mother, Pesia and Zelig, and did not meet each other. Getzel returned at night and he let them know that he found a better hiding place.

The three adults and the child, who passed from one set of arms to another, went back on the road. The road brought them to a village in the vicinity of Dobryatyn, to house of a gentile named Dmitri. Dmitri prepared a crawl space for the four of them underneath a pile of hay. There was hardly room for a single person, but all four of them squeezed in and lay down pressed and cramped together. The young Zelig did not agree to stay in this crawling place (mehila). He started to cry, ask for food, and wanted to go outside to see the sky and birds flying about. The adults were able to put up with the packed conditions, [original page 35] the suffocation and hunger, but not Zelig.

When Dimitri heard the crying, he came and ordered them to leave immediately, but after some bargaining, he agreed that my mother could stay.

There was no other choice. Getzel, his wife, and son went back on the road again and my mother stayed in hiding with the gentile Dmitri. This time my mother was provided a small storage room above a pigpen. She lay down, wrapped her face with her hair, crying bitterly for a long time. Dmitri's wife used to come from time to time and throw a little food to the small storage room where my mother was lying. After two weeks being enclosed in the small storage unit, my mother looked like the walking dead. Her face was withered, her clothes hung from her and weakness spread through her limbs. One Sunday, Dmitri's wife came up to the storage room and ordered my mother to leave. She indicated that during the Church sermon the priest had warned that whoever is hiding a Jew would be set on fire along with their family members and the Jew. Therefore, they could not take the risk of holding a Jewish woman. Desperate, my mother did not know where to go and begged that she would let her stay one more merciful day. She had the feeling that someone would have pity on her.

Help came from unexpected source. The gentile with whom they had hidden previously sent his nephew with the offer: My mother could join the Jews who lived with him "if she would live with him in a marital relationship." The offer placed an option before my mother to which she could not agree. Both options in front of her looked like a death

sentence: defile her body at the hands of the gentile, or continue looking for a hiding place among the hostile population.

Terror gripped her, and unable to make a decision, my mother remained that night in the storage room of Dmitri, with the knowledge that the end was getting close. The following day, my mother was lying in the storage room, in a semi-conscious state, afraid to make a noise, lest Dmitri come and drive her out, or the gentile would come to carry out his plot. In the evening, she heard a voice calling her name: "Bunia, get up." When she opened eyes, she saw Getzel standing above her. The emotion at the sight of him, and feelings of relief, caused my mother to cry out loud. For sure a miracle had occurred for her. Getzel gathered her up in his arms, calmed her down and told her the good news. He had returned with his wife and son to the house of Ritzvuyuk in Pintzka-Dolina, and had started to look for a new hiding place and was successful in finding a place for all of them in the house of a Polish gentile by the name of Sharek, who agreed to hide them for a large sum of money.

The hiding place at Sharek's was again in a haystack, but this time it was significantly bigger than the one at Dmitri's and there was enough space for everyone. It was already the beginning of the month Kislev and weather had turned very cold.

[page 36 in original]

Sharek brought a kettle with warm tea, in order to warm them up. The next day my mother and Getzel went to Kutzsa, a place where they left their belongings after leaving the ghetto. They took with them what they needed for the cold days that were coming: a cotton blankets and pillows that would warm their bodies in the cold days. The blankets and pillow did not significantly improve the situation. It was very cold and Zelig started to freeze. When Sharek grasped the situation, he brought a bottle with hot water for Zelig and promised to improve the hiding place.

At night, Getzel and Sharek's son went out to dig a pit underneath the cow stall. They dug a deep hole under the cow feeding trough, covered it with planks and threw straw above it, where the cows would lay down. Over time cow dung accumulated above the straw. The entrance to the hole was under the trough where the cows and pigs would be fed. The hole was narrow and humid due to the urination of the cows and only with difficulty could hold four people.

When they were lying down and one turned over, everyone of them had to turn over. The manner in which Sharek treated my mother, her brother and his family was good indeed. They received better food and not just what remained from what the pigs ate. From time to time they got pork, milk and sour cream. Sharek's wife held the view that they needed to eat well, considering that the place was cold and it was important to warm their body because they spent the entire day in a dark place, with little air and little movement. These gentiles were good people, considerate, and concerned themselves with the suffering of the Jews, but they charged a lot of money for the good food and

refuge. My mother gave them most of her belongings that had been left for safekeeping with Vaskah Paluk, as well as other belonging left for safekeeping with other gentiles.



In the Volyn Institute, in Tel Aviv, in an exhibit commemorating the experiences of the Jews of Volyn, there is a replica of a hiding place under a pigsty. One of the survivors who saved himself by hiding in a place like this, built this replica and donated it to the Volyn Institute.

Figure 16 A hiding place under a pigsty, a replica produced by Yosef Zilberg shown in the Volyn Institute.

Mendel and his family, like my mother and Getzel, were wandering from one hiding place to another.

[original page 37]

Mendel used to dig a big hole in a potato field, where he would put his wife and son, and would camouflage it with wooden logs and above them put soil and potato plants. One day when he was looking for water, he was seized by Ukrainians and badly beaten. The [family] would feed themselves from fruit and potatoes that they found in fields and orchards. Periodically, Mendel would come out of the hole, endangering himself and family, and he would go to his Polish acquaintances to beg a loaf of bread. Those who remembered him from better days felt pity and would give him a loaf of bread and butter. During his wanderings in the forest, Mendel heard that Getzel and my mother were also hiding and it was even possible they passed by one another without recognizing each other. Both had long beards and hair, were filthy and clothed in rags. The entire time that they were in the hiding place they did not get a decent shower or have an opportunity to launder their clothes. Under the cover of the darkness, they would come out to wash their faces and hands in puddles of the ghetto.

Despite these difficult conditions, they tried as much as possible to observe a Jewish way of life. Based on the Sunday visits of the gentile woman to Church, they were able to track the day of week. At the end of Shabbat (Saturday night), they would say the prayer of Rabbi Yitzhak of Berdichev, "Gott Fun Avraham", and in that way they tracked the beginning each month. They made themselves marks that helped them to remember when Jewish holidays occurred and would mark them with word or prayer.

Somber News*

Getzel and my mother fell into heavy mourning when the news reached them that their brother Yukal was murdered. Yukal was the youngest brother and the most beloved of my mother. Yukal and another twenty Jews were captured by the Ukrainian commander of Mlynov. The Ukrainian commander took away the high boots that Yukal was wearing and the gold that he had hidden in his clothes and shot him. He did the same to twenty more Jews.

One night, Getzel and his wife Pesia decided to go to the house of the non-Jew who was hiding Pesia's family, in order to get belongings they had left there. My mother stayed with Zelig in the hiding place in the cow stall. Night fell but Getzel and Pesia hadn't returned. My mother was worried that they had been captured and that she would not see them again. The night passed with prayers for their wellbeing and crying about them and for herself, now left alone with a little boy. At dawn both returned bringing bitter news. Pesia's entire family, fifteen in number, who had been hiding with the gentile, had been murdered. Shrulik Wurtzel, his wife Eta, and their three kids were murdered.

[original page 38]

Neta Richman tried to flee, he was shot, and wounded and his son Mordechai carried him on his back. The Ukrainians took the daughter Mamtsi to their headquarters, abused her for three days and then afterwards shot her. All of them were transported to Mlynov for burial. Disaster followed disaster; every day there was news of more murders. All those being murdered were people who had escaped from Mlynov and found hiding places among the gentiles in the surrounding villages. But they were captured when they were ratted out or were delivered up to the Germans by the gentiles who were hiding them, which they did from fear or in order to get a reward.

After eight days, some new information arrived [regarding] the Feldman family, cousins once removed of Pesia: Motel, and his brother Yossel and his wife Anela (i.e, the Neli whose dresses my mother had bartered back in the ghetto) and her four year old daughter, Aviva, were able to flee from the ghetto and hide in the granary of a Polish gentile named Zerumba. Aviva got sick and due to the intense cold that prevailed in the granary, her father requested that the gentile let her lie down inside his house.

When Aviva woke up and did not see her parents, she broke out in loud crying, and the gentile was afraid that her crying would betray him and the family hidden in the granary. Zerumba proposed taking Aviva to the house of his sister who was living in a village of Kivritz.²⁰ Yossel agreed because he understood that living day and night in a granary

* Editor: the Hebrew idiom literally reads "the tidings of Job", alluding to the suffering of the biblical character.

²⁰Editor's note: Based on email with Aviva, this town is now identified by the editor as Kivertsi, Ukraine today, called Kiwerce between the wars, 47 miles from Mlynov. The original footnote in the text mistakenly refers to a different town called "Korets." The original footnote reads:] "Korets is a city in

would be extremely hard on Aviva, who had a hard time to be in an enclosed place for many days and night, and she would create risk of them being turned over. To this day, Aviva remembers the journey to Kivritz. She lay down in a wagon covered with a blanket and could see the legs of the galloping horses.

Zerumba brought Aviva to her sister, Marya, and gave her a little bag of money in exchange for keeping her. Marya was happy to get the money and to strangers she presented Aviva as if she was her niece. Aviva's appearance, which was fair-blue eyes, and light hair, and the fact she spoke Polish fluently, helped stage Aviva as her sister's daughter, who had been sent to work in Germany.

In the evening when Aviva was moved to Kivritz, (her father) Yossel went among all the relatives who were hiding in different place and told them about the woman in Kivritz who was holding his daughter and asked that if any one of them should remain alive, they should take her, so that she should not grow up as among the gentiles.

[original page 39]



Figure 17 Korets-Wikipedia²¹

After some time, Zerumba ordered the Feldmans to leave his house, because in the area searches were being organized for Jews in hiding.

The Feldmans found a new hiding place with a gentile widow near the village of Dobrotyn. They paid an exorbitant sum, and she let them sleep temporarily on top of the fireplace and she promised them a better hiding place. Days went by and the woman did not prepare the hiding place she promised. When they entreated her to do so, she promised she would do so in one of the coming days.

Ukraine about 66 km from Rovno. Before the Shoah, 6,000 Jews lived in the city. In September 1942, the ghetto in the city was liquidated along with all the Jews in the city. Wikipedia.”

²¹ Photo-Wikipedia. [Editor's note: see the prior note correcting the location where Aviva was living]

One day she prepared a meal for the Feldmans and left the house. That evening Ukrainians arrived, broke down the door, and put a sheaf of hay in the middle of the house and set it on fire. The Ukrainians ordered the Feldmans to come down from above the fireplace but they refused to come down. Yossel jumped out of the window and the Ukrainians who surrounded the house on the outside split his head with an axe and severely wounded him. Motel and Anila came down from above the fireplace and they were brought by wagon to Mlynov by Evonne, the son-in-law of Ritzvuyuk. On the way Anila bandaged the head of Yossel with a kerchief and without explanation gave Evonne a photo and scarf. Evonne was smart and not an anti-Semite. He understood that the couple had a daughter and that it was Anila's wish to bequeath the scarf and photo to their daughter after the war.

Anila, Yossel and Motel were brought to Mlynov, they were shot and buried together with the Wurtzel family who were also relatives. Evonne told my mother, Getzel and Pesia about these events.

At night, my mother, Getzel and Pesia, had dreams influenced by the difficult events which they heard day after day.

[original page 40]

In the morning they used to tell each other their dreams. One night in my mother's dream, the rabbi of Mervits was holding a Torah scroll written with letters in gold. The rabbi cried out loud, "Bunia choose a letter from this Torah scroll and make a vow starting with this letter." When she woke up, my mother told her brother and her sister-in-law about her dream and she added, "Master of the Universe, I don't know if I shall survive, but if so, I will rescue the daughter of Yossel Feldman, I will not let her remain in the hands of the gentiles."

The Feldman Family

The Feldmans were relatives of Pesia's (the sister-in-law of my mother) family, and they knew my mother very well from visits to relatives in Mlynov. At the time of the Mlynov ghetto and after its liquidation, the refugees who succeeded in escaping, crossed paths as they sought hiding places in the villages around Mlynov.

Yosef, the father of the Feldman family was born in 1905 in the town of Berestechko.²² He studied in the Tarbut school, learned Hebrew, and prepared to make aliyah to the Land of Israel. After he finished his engineering studies, he began to work as a manager of a farm near Ruzichitz.²³ The farm was spread over a wide area that included forest,

²² Berestechko is a town on the banks of the Styr river in the Volyn area, 30 km west of Dubno. During the period of WWII, the fate of Jews was similar to that of Jews in Mlynov. On September 7th, 1942, 4,500 Jews of the city were murdered and buried in killing pits. Only a few Jews managed to survive. Wikipedia.

²³ Rozhyshe – a town on the banks of the Styr in the area of Volyn. On the eve of the German occupation, there were 6,000 Jews living there who made up 80% of the town's residents. In February 1942, the ghetto was established and by August 1942 the ghetto was liquidated and the inhabitants were shot dead in the pits. Only a few Jews managed to survive. Wikipedia.

fields of wheat, and they raised horses to sell. At the farm, he met Neli, the daughter of the farm's owner, and in 1938 they got married.



Figure 18 Aviva's parents and her grandmother before the Shoah

[original page 41]

Neli (or Anila) was given a non-Jewish name by her parents so she would not suffer from antisemitism. She was the only daughter of her parents, she went to a Polish school and in order to complete her education they engaged private teachers to teach her in her own home. Among other things, Neli learned to play piano and ride horses. Neli was raised as a daughter of a wealthy class; she had her own horse that she loved to ride.

The couple delayed making Aliyah to the Land of Israel because Neli was afraid she would not be able to stand the difficult conditions in the Land. Yosef continued to work in the farm and in the spring of 1939, Aviva, their daughter, was born. Aviva was given a Hebrew name because Josef wanted to make aliyah and Aviva was born in the spring (in Hebrew: "aviva" means spring). For Yosef, immigration ("aliyah") to Israel was a certainty; it was only a question of time until they could make it a reality. Aviva was a spoiled child and raised in a household with luxuries.

Shoshana, the sister of Yosef, immigrated to Israel in 1936 and joined Kibbutz Ein Harod. Yosef, his brother Motel, and both his other sisters, Hannah and Pepe, remained in Poland.

When the War broke out, the family was living by Yossel's parents in Berestechko, and with the establishment of the ghetto in Mlynov were transferred there. With Yosef and his family there were both sisters, his brother and parents. After the liquidation of the ghetto, they were dispersed among different hiding places. When Yosef and Neli

deposited their daughter with the Polish family in Kivritz, they told all the children about the family where they had placed Aviva, in order that if anyone survived the war, they could get her out from Polish hands and raise her as a Jewish woman.

As mentioned before, the Feldman family meet their death in the killing pits of Mlynov. Pesia, the daughter of Yossel's aunt, survived, and my mother, sister-in-law of Pesia, is the one who rescued Aviva from Polish hands and returned her to the bosom of Judaism. This story will be recounted in what follows.

[original page 42]

In the Midst of Fighting Between Poles and Ukrainians

The stay at the hiding place of Sharek lasted nine months. At the end of 1942, and beginning of 1943, a very difficult period began. The Ukrainians and Poles began to set fire to each other's houses.²⁴ The Poles of Pintzaska-Dolina left and moved to the city of Lutsk.²⁵ Sharek and his sons, who were Polish, remained in their house, and my mother Getzel and Pesia were hiding at their place in the pig sty. In this period, there was little food and they were feeding themselves from what was left over from what had been thrown to the pigs, and from potatoes and beets that they would gather from the fields under the protection of darkness at night, the time they would leave the pit. Every night, Getzel would go up to the roof of Sharek to see if the Ukrainians were coming close with the intent of setting the house on fire. His reasoning was that if he could see them in time, they would have sufficient time to escape before they were set on fire.

One night after the Festival of Weeks (Shavuot), Getzel saw the Ukrainians were coming close; he ran back to the hiding place, yelling, "We are going to be burned by fire. Give me the child and try to run away." My mother quickly tied up their belongings. Getzel grabbed Zelig but Pesia suffered from lumbago [a form of back pain] and was not able to move. With great effort, my mother pulled Pesia from the hiding place and with significant difficulty the two of them got out of the house that started to burn. The sound of shooting was heard nearby and the whole village was on fire. My mother and Pesia crawled to the fields and lay there. Sharek and his son also were lying near them.

²⁴ The hostility between Poles and Ukrainians existed for hundreds of years and got worse during WWI when areas of large Ukrainian populations was given to the Polish state which was established up after WWI, among them areas of Volyn. Other areas of Ukraine were given to Romania and others were added to the Soviet Union. In the period of WWII, the Ukrainians were actively participating with the Germans including in the killing of the Jews, with the hopes that after WWII the Germans would help them establish an independent Ukrainian that was divided during the war between the Soviet Union, Poland and Romania. When Germany started to lose the war against the Soviet Union, it became clear to the Ukrainians that the Germans would not fulfill their promise, they started mob killings of the Polish population burning Polish villages, carrying out dreadful acts on the inhabitants and killing the remnant of Jews that they found in the forest and in hiding places.

²⁵ Lutsk is located at the center of Volyn region. Wikipedia.

Getzel and Zelig were not with them. Pesia began to cry bitterly. She didn't want to continue living without her husband and son.

After a bit of time, they detected a human form coming towards them. Vladek, son of Sharek, thought it was a Ukrainian and wanted to shoot him, but Pesia stopped him from shooting. She thought that perhaps it was Getzel and Zelig and indeed it was them. Zelig was very afraid and Getzel was also totally shaking from fright. Continuing to stay in proximity of Sharek's house was dangerous; they needed to move to a different place. That night my mother, Getzel and Pesia and Zelig walked to the field of Berakev and stayed there eight days. They lay down in the field of wheat under the sky. The days were blazing hot and at night rain fell and it was cold. They were nourished from the seeds of the wheat, and drinking filthy water from rain that gathered in puddles. The suffering was great.

[original page 43]

Danger and Other Events

My mother couldn't stand suffering any more. She fainted and when she woke up, she said that she could not continue under these conditions. What will be will be; they had to find another place to hide. The three of them and the boy, they dragged themselves to the loft of Ukrainians who were not occupying their homes. Early in the morning my mother came down to garden of the gentiles, picked cherries and went back to the loft. For several few days, they nourished themselves on cherries and water only. After some time, the inhabitants of the house returned. Evonne, the gentile in whose of house they were hiding, agreed to continue to keep them. He dug a pit and my mother, Getzel, Pesia, and Zelig, hid there.

In the winter of 1943, a difficult period began for the Ukrainians.²⁶ They prepared large shelters for themselves in the fields and hid there, like the Jews. The entrances and exits from the hiding pits were through the field. Evonne was taken away by the Germans and his wife was hiding together with my mother Getzel and Pesia. Those hiding in the hole didn't know what was happening outside.

One day they heard knocking above the hole in which they were hiding and thought that it was Germans organizing searches and about to find them. Later, they learned it was indeed the German, but they were not conducting searches, but were beheading birds which they had hunted. They were doing so precisely above the cow trough that was above the hole where they were hiding.

²⁶ In 1943, the strength of the Soviet Partisan movement grew in the Volyn area. There appeared Polish partisan groups from the "Home Army" [the dominant resistance movement in Poland]. The Soviet partisans and Poles worked together against the Germans and the Ukrainians, who had their own partisan movement, but the latter grew weaker because the Soviets was growing stronger. The Soviet partisans occupied areas in the north of Volhynia. <https://www.kamin-koshirsky.org.il/he/history/kamin/jews-in-wohlin>

Getzel was thinking that the chances to survive were close to zero with the new conditions that obtained. The Soviets were chasing the Ukrainians, the Germans were chasing the Poles and Jews and there was no longer anyone left who could hide them. Getzel separated himself from his family and decided to leave the hiding place, because taking a bullet himself was preferable to his only son being wounded. Living with the constant threat of danger took a significant toll on them. Everyone's nerves were frayed and they felt like they could not go on anymore. But in spite of all the dangers and threats, my mother, Getzel, Pesia and Zelig were not discovered.

One night after Evonne the Ukrainian gentile was released from German hands, and his wife had left the hole and gone up above, he came down into the pit and told them to leave. "I have kept you for six months, more than this, terrifies me. If the Germans find the hiding place and discover all of you and my wife, they will shoot you and her."

[original page 44]

This was the fate which my mother and her brothers found in every hiding place. They didn't know what to do. It was wintertime with heavy snow; my mother and her family lacked warm clothes and didn't even have shoes. But there was no other choice and they needed to look for another hiding place. With no options, and lacking everything, they again left at night and searched for a new hiding place.

At end of 1943, the Germans were facing defeats and the end was drawing near. Getzel took my mother to a Polish gentile [also] by the name of Evonne who served as a secretary for the Germans. This gentile was thinking that if he could help my mother he could save himself through the good deed which he did. Getzel, his wife and his son went looking for a different hiding place. As mentioned, the gentile who hid my mother was called Evonne, who was now the second Evonne who hid her. Evonne kept her on top of the stove and he took care to provide her with good food.

Getzel Seeks Revenge

During the long months, when they were in hiding and going from one to another, the news reached them about the death of other family members. Getzel heard that his brother, Mendel and family, were murdered by Ukrainians. Mendel received similar news about Getzel.

Before the separation of Getzel and his family from his sister Bunia, the two of them went to the house of another gentile seeking a little food, because the food they received from Evonne (number one) was meager and they were hungry all the time. This gentile was a Communist and Getzel knew he could trust him and get a little food from him.

When they came to his yard, the Communist came out towards them and urged them to hide because someone was in his house. He directed them to a dirt hut and asked them to wait there. Suddenly, Getzel perceived the figure of someone getting closer and he

recognized him as a Russian soldier, with whom he used to work, for the Soviets.²⁷ This Russian soldier became a partisan and was wearing the uniform of the Soviet army. Getzel and this Russian were happy to see each other. They hugged and kissed each other, and the Russian brought food and gave Getzel shaving equipment so that he could shave his long beard. That entire day Getzel and my mother sat with the Russian partisan, eating pork, radishes and bread, that the Russian had brought with him, and they listened to news from the front. They heard about the defeats the Germans were absorbing and the approach of the Soviet army in the direction of Volyn.

[original page 45]

Before he took leave, Getzel made the following request of the Russian partisan. "I don't know if we will survive, but you will remain alive. I have one request to make of you. Vaska Paluk slaughtered twenty-two Jews, my brother Mendel among them. I want you to take revenge on this goy." The partisan made a note and assured him he would take care of this matter. Paluk was not the only gentile on whom revenge needed to fall. After not much delay, the news reached mother and Getzel that one day after the meeting with the partisan, unknown men came and grabbed Vaska Paluk, another gentile by name of Sinuk, and another gentile and terminated all three of them.

As mentioned earlier, a short time after this event my mother and Getzel were separated. My mother was alone hiding with [the man named] Evonne. She was sitting all day on top of the oven and was plucking out the feathers of chickens and ducks for the wife of Evonne; she would pluck and cry. Despite the improved food she was getting, she felt massive loneliness. The separation from Getzel and his family was too hard to bear.

One day there was an attack on the nearby village of Kutza. The gentile took my mother down and into a shelter. The entire day she was in the shelter. The fear of being buried alive and suicidal thoughts crept into her heart. "For what purpose should I continue to suffer." My mother wanted to put an end to her life. Lacking a knife, she started to pull out her hair and bite her skin. In the evening when the gentile came to take her out of the shelter, and he was stunned at her appearance. He crossed himself in fright, inquired about her health and calmed her down, because she needed to hang in there for only a bit more time, until the approaching end of the war. My mother went back to her place above the oven. She continued to pluck feathers and lament her separation from Getzel and Pesia.

My mother understood that the suicidal thoughts that were taking control of her would not abate unless she returned and was united with her brother. Despite the great danger, my mother decided to leave the house of the gentile and to go to her brother Getzel. The distance between the two hiding places was not great, about 5 km. One

²⁷ As previously mentioned, the area of Volyn was occupied by the Russian Soviets during WWII and only in June 1941 did the Germans capture the area and begin to implement their murderous policies.

night she covered her feet with rags trampled through the heavy snow and got to her brother. Again they were together.

In 2006, I, Shoshana, daughter of Bunia, went with a group of students to Poland and Ukraine. I went with a heavy heart because at the time my mother was against my walking on grounds saturated by the blood of her family and that of my father. But I wanted to see the places that she often used to talk about, and I thought this way I might be able to understand a bit better what went on in her wanderings in the land that was cold and hostile. In addition to synagogues and yeshivas [original page 46]



and graves of great Torah scholars, I saw big piles of hay in the fields of Ukraine which were very different from haystacks in Israel. It was only then that I understood how an entire family was able to hide in them.

Figure 19 A pile of hay in a field in Ukraine²⁸

Free At Last

The front came closer, the sounds of shooting could be heard from afar. Getzel would go out of the hole where we were hiding and go up on to the attic in order to better hear the shooting that was getting closer. The approaching front also announced the coming of revenge. One day a rumor arrived indicating that the Russians were near Rovno. My mother decided that the time has come to come out of the hiding place and go back to Mervits—what would be, would be. My mother wanted to be in her town on the day it was liberated from the Nazi yoke of occupation. She knew that she would be able to find a hiding place at their neighbor, a gentile by the name of Onfori.

Onfori was a gentile with a good heart, a friend of the family, who was hiding in his place a family of six people and at the time had also offered to hide my mother and her family in his house. But my mother was suspicious of Onfori's son Alexi, and therefore she declined the offer. But now, she knew that she would be able to rely on his help.

One night of heavy snowfall in January 1944, my mother arrived at the house of Onfori, On her way she passed German tanks, but they didn't identify her. To be sure, they were busy saving themselves from the approaching Russians. When she arrived in

²⁸ <https://www.google.co.il/search> [Editor's note: the original url does not specify the url where the photo was found].

Mervits a neighbor belonging to the Banderivtsi recognized her.²⁹ My mother entered the house of Onfori and was greeted warmly. The members of Onfori's house were happy to see her.

[original page 47]

A short time after she entered, a Banderivtsi came in and asked about her. He indicated that he had seen her and people said that she was at Onfori's. Onfori's wife told the Banderivtsi that she didn't know anything about my mother and hadn't seen her. Using greater caution, she put my mother under the bed and my mother stayed there for two days. Onfori and his wife did not know how to console my mother or support her. Everything that had happened to her and her family during the war was incomprehensible to them. The same dilemma pursued the Jews after the War. They lavished on her food and drinks and hid her out of sight of the Banderivtsi, but my mother cared only for expected arrival of Russians.

On the third day after arriving in Mervits, the woman of the house came and told her that the Russian partisans had arrived in Mervits. The Russian partisans were going among the village residents and searching for Germans. When they came to the house of Onfori, they met my mother. They were happy to meet a Jewish survivor and my mother told them about the period of hiding in the different hiding places. A day after that, the Russian army entered Mervits. The Russian army made headquarters at Onfori's house and directed further questions to my mother. Who is she? How did she survive? Among the officers was a Russian Jew who was emotional to see my mother, like a father that found his lost son. He quickly brought her clothes and a pair of shoes.

Getzel and Mendel met each other towards the end of the war and did not recognize one another. At the end of January 1944, (Friday, the first of the month of Shevat) Mendel arrived to Misraka,* a place where Jews from Mervits were, and among them Getzel. When Mendel arrived, the people there asked him to identify himself. Due to his bushy beard and long hair, they didn't recognize him.

When Mendel heard that this is his brother, he couldn't contain himself and began to sob. Time elapsed before he could talk again. When Getzel heard this was Mendel, he

²⁹ Banderivtsi – a nickname for the Ukrainian group named after the Stepan Bandera who was a Ukrainian national and worked for the liberation of independent Ukraine. In the period of WWII, Bandera wanted to exploit the German invasion of the Soviet Union for the good of Ukrainian independence. In 1942, partisans groups of Ukrainian nationalists were called Banderivtsi after Bandera. They numbered 4,000 men. They engaged in the extensive murder of the Polish population, burning Polish villages, and carrying out terrible deeds against them. They also murdered the remnants of the Jews they found in the forest and in hiding places. The war against them was very difficult because they enjoyed the support of the local populations. www.historicalmoments2.com.

* Editor's note: I suspect that this town refers to what today is called Mezhyrichi, Ukraine, located 27 km east of Rivne. The narrative indicates that this town was close to Rivne. Today the town appears on maps as Velyki Mezhyrichi: <https://www.jewishgen.org/Communities/community.php?usbgn=-1046531>

cried out loud, “Mendel, they killed you,” and he told him that Sharek’s son told him Mendel was killed. And he also told him about the murder of their mother, and murder of Herschel and Yukalah (Yukal) their brothers. After a time Mendl also met the brothers of his wife, Yossel and Berel Rabinovitch. Mendel went from Misraka to Rovno and that is where he stayed until the liberation from the hands of the Germans.

[original page 48 blank]

[original page 49]

Chapter 4

Recovering from Profound Disaster

“With a backpack of memories on my shoulder, and a walking stick of hope in my hand, I know from whence I came and with both hope and trembling I seek to know where I headed.

(K. Tzatnik)

[original page 50]

After the Liberation

The war came to an end. Getzel and his family, Mendel and his family, and my mother returned to Mervits, starving, dirty with only t-shirt covering their body. My grandmother, Yukal, Chanan and Tzvi, my mother's brothers, and her sister Faiga, and Faiga's husband and their children, did not return. A few weeks of recovery passed and the gathering of the broken ones. The need to take care of daily needs pushed away the mourning and melancholy. Getzel, Pesia, and Zelig lived in a house that survived in the Jewish section of Mlynov, where the ghetto had been.*

Aviva's Return to the Family Embrace (literally "bosom of the family")

After the holiday of Shavuot, my mother remembered the vow she made after she learned what had happened to Feldman family: to restore Aviva, the daughter of Yossel, who was with the Christian family in the town of Kivritz, to the embrace of the family and the Jewish people. My mother traveled to Kivritz in an effort to return the girl. One of the Polish neighbors in Mervits was familiar with the story of Aviva and knew where she could be found. The neighbor lent my mother a dress and shoes. My mother traveled to Kivritz and she stayed there with a Jewish family. The next morning she found the house of the Polish family who was caring for Aviva and she went to visit her.

My mother presented herself to the Polish family as a relative of Aviva and asked permission to see her. The woman of the house called Aviva and when my mother saw her, the girl announced that she didn't remember my mother and that her name was Visha and not Aviva. In fact, Aviva had met my mother when she was four years old but there had not been an ongoing acquaintance and Aviva was too young to remember. At this point Aviva was five and a half and didn't remember people from her early childhood and certainly not the fact that she was Jewish.

My mother took out a small coat that she found in the ghetto and had belonged to Aviva. She showed it to Aviva and Aviva recognized it, "That's my coat," she yelled. After that, she was willing to get closer to my mother. My mother hugged her and cried. Seeing the emotional reunion, Marya the woman of the house, also began crying, but she refused to release Aviva to my mother. She made it known, that if Aviva's mother would come to get her, she would relinquish her, but my mother was a stranger and she would not give her up, except in exchange for five hundred gold coins (called "finvilak" in Polish).

[original page 51]

This was a huge sum for my mother, because all her money was used up to pay the gentiles for hiding places which were provided for her and Getzel during war. But now

* Editor's note: Gerry Steinberg (Zelig) recalls that it was formerly the house of the rabbi.

she didn't even have her own dress. She explained the situation to Polish woman who in response turned Aviva against her.

Later on, Aviva would recall that when she came to the house of Marya and her husband they took her to church and presented her as Marya's niece. When she visited the church, she did not know the gentile customs, and when she saw the basin of the baptismal waters, she put her hand into it. Marya and her husband were horrified and frightened that the act would make the others suspicious of them. They took Aviva home and explained to her this was an act she must not do. Subsequently, Aviva did not repeat this act. Aviva very much liked to go to the church on Sundays. The walls of the church were covered with nice drawing, in the church they used to play, and sometimes sing and the farmers came with children and she had someone with whom she could play. On ordinary days, Aviva never met kids, because they did not let her play with the neighbors kids.

Marya's household was very poor. It was shack, without a paved floor and only a floor of packed sand, with one room that served Marya and her husband as a bedroom and kitchen with a stove where Aviva also slept. Aviva had only one change of clothes, which she came with and wore day and night. The food was meager. Aviva received one meal a day that included a glass of milk and slice of bread. The meager food that she received prevented her growth during the year and a half that she was in Kivritz. From conversations between Marya and her husband, Aviva over time gathered that her parents had died and would not come to back to get her. This news made her depressed and continually sad. She used to sit by the door of the bedroom and tell herself stories.

Despite the news that Aviva's parents had been killed, Marya expected that a survivor from the Feldman family would arrive and pay for Aviva and take her away. When my mother arrived, Marya thus asked her for money

After the meeting with Avivia, my mother went back to the Jewish home in Kivritz [where she was staying] and made a plan to take Aviva from the Polish home.

The following day, my mother asked permission from the Polish woman to take Aviva for a small outing to the market to buy her sweets. Aviva was very excited by the opportunity to eat candy. In the days of the war, there was much poverty, and barely any food to eat, let alone sweets.

[original page 52]

The Polish woman agreed but she warned my mother, "Don't try to flee." My mother assured the Polish woman that this was not her intention and anyway she had no place to flee, even though her plan was to run away with the girl.

They went out in the direction of the market and along the way there was a gentile coachman waiting for them who was going toward Mlynov. The gentile was hired by the Jewish family from Krivitz to take my mother and Aviva to Mlynov in exchange for a

bottle of vodka. On the way, she told the coachman she was mother of Aviva and that the two of them had managed to survive the war. The road to Mlynov passed through a forest and when the coachman entered it, he stopped with the excuse that he was tired and had to rest a bit.

My mother understood that the time permitted [for the outing] was short. The Polish woman would certainly realize that Aviva had been kidnapped and call for help to pursue after them. The Polish woman had been the person closest to Aviva during the last year and a half. My mother's feelings of distress were felt by Aviva and she started to cry to take her back to her "aunt" and her home (in Kivritz). She cried a long time and after much crying finally fell asleep. The coachman started to drink the bottle of vodka, got drunk, and tried to take advantage of his time with my mother. My mother pushed him away and started to scream for help. She began to berate him and yelled about how such a thing could be done after she and the girl had managed to survive the war and he trying to ruin her life. The yelling awakened Aviva and the coachman got scared by the yelling and the threats and left my mother alone.

Suddenly, there was the sound of a truck; it was of Soviet soldiers. My mother stopped the truck and requested the soldiers to take her to Mlynov. The soldiers helped them into the truck and in a short time they arrived in Mlynov. When they arrived in Mlynov, news was spread that Bunia had come back with the girl and everyone was moved when greeting them. Aviva was received very warmly in Mlynov. During her entire stay with the Polish family, her body had never been washed. The Poles were accustomed to wash only their face and hands. My mother got a washtub and washed Aviva. Aviva was small and skinny and her body was covered with sores. After they washed her, they bandaged her sores, her clothes they threw in the fire, and one of the neighbors sewed her a dress and a doll from the remnants of cloth she found. My mother sewed her socks.

My mother brought Aviva to her brother Getzel's house. Getzel and Pesia were interested in adopting Aviva, knowing that they would not have more children [and that Pesia was related to Aviva].*

Aviva acclimated to Getzel and Pesia very quickly. During the stay with the gentiles, Aviva felt that she didn't belong to their family. Suddenly, she was surrounded by people who knew her parents and grandparents and could tell her about them. Overnight, she went from being a Christian girl to a Jewish one. In the beginning, Aviva used to cross herself every evening before going to sleep and she requested

[original page 53]

* Pesia's mother was maternal grandmother of Aviva according to a conversation with Aviva.



Figure 20 Family photo-My uncle Getzel, my mother's oldest brother, Gerry (Zelig) their son, Pesia my aunt, and Aviva in Pocking.

to go to the church like she used to go with her Polish “aunt”. My mother acceded to her request and took her to church in Mlynov. Before going into the church, my mother spit in both directions to signal her contempt for the church. Little by little Aviva was weaned from Christian customs and stopped asking to go to church. She and Zelig became close, and they were of similar ages and felt like siblings.



Figure 21 Aviva and Zelig (Gerry) in the displaced person camp Pocking. (right)



*Figure 22 Aviva in Pocking.**

* Gerry Steinberg indicates this photo was taken in Israel, not Pocking.

[original page 54]

My mother used to visit Aviva and tell her about her family and teach her Jewish customs. Step by step, Aviva started feel like a part of a family and returned to the embrace (lit. bosom) of Judaism.

Yitzhak Returns to Mervits

When the war was over, but even before he was released from the army, my father decided to defect from the army and look for the members of his family in the town where he was born. He stole onto a freight train that was headed in the direction of western Ukraine. A journey that was said to take three weeks, flew by* and took only three days. When he arrived in town, the magnitude of tragedy hit him. Not a single person from his family remained alive. The survivors who escaped returned to the town and told him what had happened to Jews of the Mlynov ghetto and his family. My father felt profound loneliness and looked for familiar faces that he knew before war. This is how he got closer to my mother and Getzel, whom he knew from when they kids.

A short time after the Jews returned to Mlynov, they decided to erect a memorial to commemorate of those who perished, close to the killing pits where the residents of the ghetto were put to death. Getzel was among those who organized the commemoration. Before they stood up the memorial, they opened up the pit to identify who was buried there. Zelig and Aviva heard about it and went to watch. Aviva was hoping to see her parents and maybe hoping they would emerge alive. Near the killing pit there were scattered pieces of clothes. Aviva looked into the pit, saw the remains of the dead, and she ran away terrified. The sight was shocking, and she remained terrified for a long time.



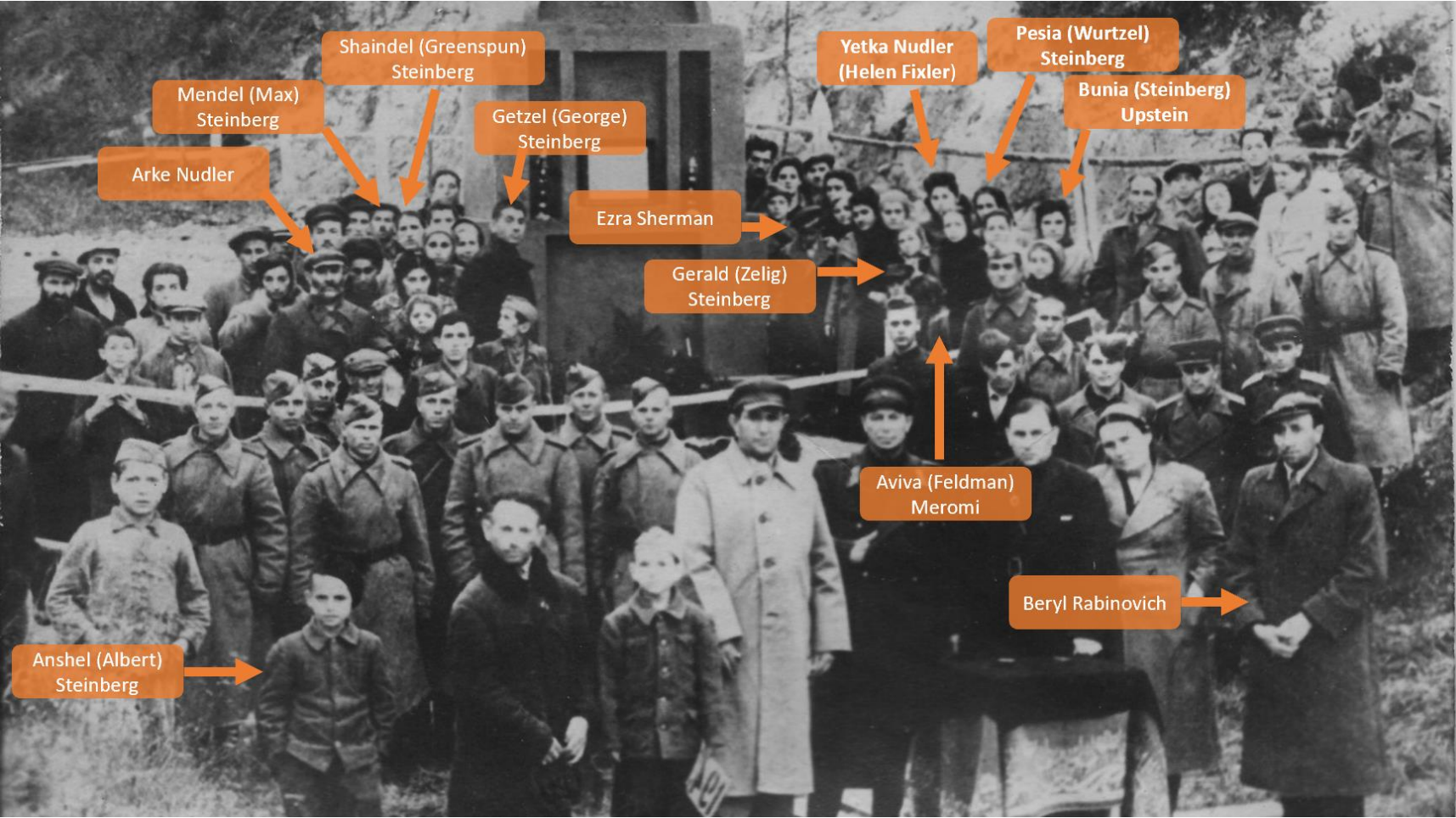
* Editor's note: The Hebrew idiom is "the road leapt to him," an expression that typically means that it flew by and sometimes has the connotation in Jewish tradition of a miraculous event.

[original page 55]

The survivors and Russian soldiers in the area came to the dedication of the memorial.

The Jewish community tried to revive community life. But this was a community without children or elders. Only three remained: Aviva, Zelig, Anshel (son of Mendel). When meeting, people would tell each other about the terrible events that happened during the Shoah. After the war, a new antisemitism was renewed by the Poles and emissaries from Palestine who called upon the Jews to immigrate (aliyah) to the Land.

For all of these reasons, the survivors that came back to Mervits decided not to reclaim life in the town filled with blood of their loved ones and near the neighbors who saw their suffering and did not extend a hand to help. All the survivors decided to wander westward.



[original page 57]

Chapter 5 Displacement Camp in Pocking

“Once you want to go to the Land of Israel, then
you must overcome the obstacles and delays.

(Nathan of Breslov)

[original page 58]

For months, men, women and children wandered through mountains and forests to the displacement camps.¹ Part of the journey was by foot. Adults children who a short time before were living in hiding and in fear from informers and others who sought ill for them, once again took their lives in their own hands and they went on a long journey, tiring and dangerous because they could not bear to live near the killing pits of their loved ones who were killed by evil people and the houses that were filled with smells and memories of their lives there not long ago.

The Jews from all the countries that were occupied by the Nazis came to the displacement camps that the Americans and British had erected in Germany, Austria and Italy. And in those places they were looking for their relatives and a way to reestablish their lives. Those camps were also a bridge for immigrating to the Land of Israel or the United states.

In 1945, after a long journey that included a month delay in Czechoslovakia, my father, mother, Mendel and his family, Getzel and his wife and their son Zelig and their adopted daughter Aviva, arrived in the Pocking² displaced person camp, not far from Munich, in Western Germany, where they began to rehabilitate their lives and make plans for the future.

¹ Displacement camps—After the Shoah, the Western Allies set up camps for the Nazi prisoners that they brought for slave labor to Germany and Austria who were liberated by the Allies at the end of the war in May 1945. The camps were erected in Austria, Germany, and Italy. Most of the camps were had been concentration camps or German military camps and now they were under protection of the Americans and British. The first inhabitants of camp were Jewish survivors of camps, and other nationalities, freed from camps in Germany. The conditions in the camps were difficult, with a lack of food, clothing, and medicine. Over time, the other nationalities headed back to their own countries but the Jews remained in the camps. After the establishment of Israel in 1948, and a change of immigration laws of laws in the US, most of the displaced Jews immigrated to Israel or to the US. The DP camps were closed in 1950, except for one that continued until 1957. http://www.yadvashem.org/vy/he/exhibitions/dp_camps/index.asp

² The displaced person camp “Pocking”— was established by the Americans in 1945 near Waldstadt in Western Germany. This was the largest DP camp under the American occupation in Germany. In 1946 there were 7645 refugees, most of them Jews. The refugees dwelled in barracks that served the German air force during the war. The camp was known for inferior sanitation and living conditions and also a shortage of food. In spite of this, they organized a rich community life there with trade courses via the ORT network, yeshiva, and Talmud Torah (religious grade school), collectives (“kibbutzim”) and kindergartens. The camp was closed in February 1949. <http://dpcamps.ort.org/camps/germany/us-zone/us-zone-iii/pocking>

[original page 59]



Figure 23 Gerry, cousin, son of my uncle Getzel, and cousin, Anshel son of my uncle Mendel, in a car in Pocking in Germany



Figure 24 Gerry and Aviva



Figure 25 Gerry and Anshel on a motorcycle in Pocking

The camp was a military camp during the war. The displaced persons were placed into barracks that previously were living quarters for soldiers. In every barrack were 15–20 rooms and every family got a room. In each room was a wide bed, a coal burning stove, a table and four chairs. For the children, they added folding military cots which they opened to sleep at night. Getzel, Pesia, Zelig and Aviva lived in one room.

At the end of the barracks was a water faucet, but the barracks did not include bathroom or showers. Those facilities were a few hundred meters away and served the displaced people who lived in several barracks.

[original page 60]

Every week they apportioned food that was needed and every few months gave you clothing that was sent by to the camp by The Joint [Distribution Committee].

In the camp there were Jews from different countries. Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, and nice friendships were developed between them. A rich Jewish life was also established there: Jewish grade schools, synagogues, Gemara studies, and community life.

In the camps they celebrated the Jewish holidays and there were many weddings among them the wedding of my parents.



Figure 26 Aviva carries loaves of bread in the pocking camp



Figure 27 A study session in Pocking, at the [far] head of the table my father is leaning to the right.

[original 61]

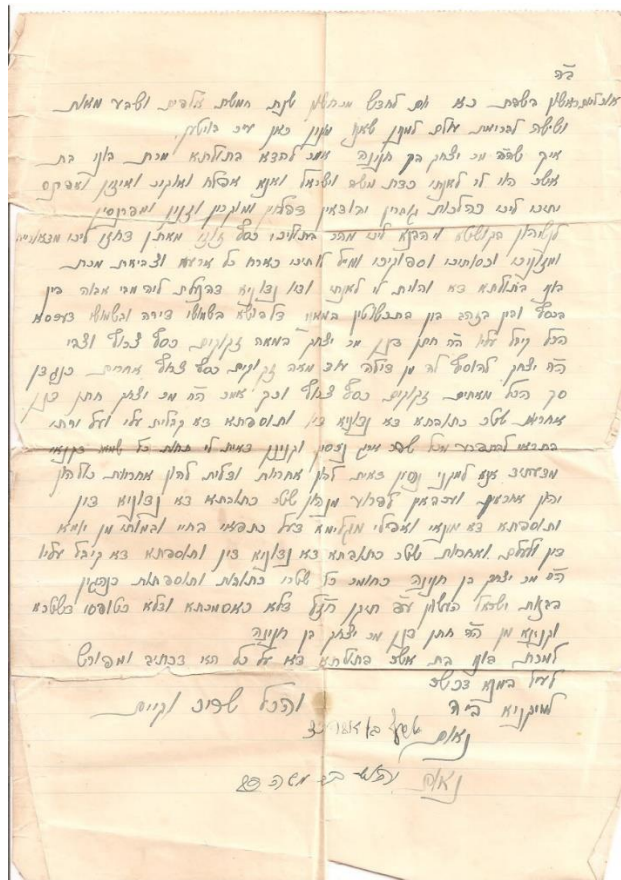


Figure 28 Photo: Marriage certificate (ketuba) of father and mother, written by older relatives Nahum Teitelman, may his memory be for a blessing, on a plain folio.*



Figure 29 Families of survivors in Pocking, my mother with my brother, Hanina, front row right, 1947.

The main occupation of the survivors in the displaced person camp was searching for relatives. They sought survivors from their extended families. Perhaps a close or distant relative miraculously survived and now, after the war, they would be able to make a connection. Jewish organizations drew up lists of survivors and published them in the various displaced persons camp, in the European countries and in Israel.

[original page 62]



Figure 30 A nurse hold Hanina as a baby three days old in Germany 1947



Figure 31 My brother–Hanina and Chaim in the displaced person camp

It was not easy to raise two babies in the difficult living conditions of Pocking. The bitter cold of winter made life very difficult. My mother needed to launder diapers of the boys every day. To do so necessitated bringing water from the end of the hallway to boil the diapers and then go outside to hang them up. In the bitter cold, the diapers used to freeze while hanging from the line. You had to take them down carefully from the line, in case they would tear, and one would have to warm them up in the room before folding. My mother did not benefit from the help of Pesia and the kids [Zelig and Aviva] because they were living in a block a distance away from hers.

My mother used to cook food on a kerosene stove and the pots were the cans of preserved food. My father made symbols on those cans in order to separate meat and milk. There were Jews whose faith was weakened after the Shoah, like my uncle Getzel, and there were those whose faith was strengthened like my father. My mother knew that upholding the dietary laws [keeping kosher] was very important to my father, and she promised him that when they had their own house and kitchen, she would be very diligent.

[original page 63]



Figure 32 My brother Hanina



Figure 33 My mother with my brother Hanina and Chaim



Figure 34 My brother Hanina as a baby in Germany–1947

Every Sabbath afternoon, my parents would visit Getzel and Pesia and their kids. They would drink tea with Kigelach (leavened dough with cacao and sugar) and used to converse with each other. During the summer, they used to go out to stroll in the streets of the camp, (such strolls) referred to in Yiddish as “Shpazirin.” At such times, the streets were filled with women, men and kids who were also out for a stroll. This was a joyous communal occurrence. People would greet one another, exchange blessings and converse. There was a good camaraderie between the people in the camps and mutual support. The children would play and run around. The young people were getting married and having kids.



Figure 35 From right to left, Gerry (Zelig), Aviva holding Hanina (Charles) Upstein, and Anshel son of Menachem Mendel

[original page 64]



Figure 36 My Mother holding my brother the first born Hanina in Pocking, Germany

Most of the Jews in the camps engaged in various activities. Peddling, trade and more. My parents were involved in chocolate and Getzel got himself a pair of bicycles and began to work at a place with warm healing springs close to the camp. Zelig and Aviva were good friends, went together to school, where they met kids of their own age, learned Hebrew and some math.

The classes were packed tight; the study books were in Hebrew and there were many talks about the Land of Israel. The teacher would show pictures and would read the Hebrew text underneath and afterwards translate it to Yiddish. In the school there used to be a big hall with a piano and the music teacher would play and sing and teach the children Hebrew songs. The teachers portrayed an idealistic view of life in the Land of Israel and encouraged the children to desire to make aliyah (“go up”) to the Land of Israel, to swim in the blue sea and work in the fields. Zelig and Aviva studied for four years in the camp schools.

[original page 65]



Figure 37 Photo of "Cheder" for sacred texts in the DP Camp Pocking. Zelig is fifth from left.



Figure 38 Morning assembly for elementary school in the DP camp Pocking

There were also activities for the youth group Betar in which Zelig and Aviva participated



Figure 39 The youth movement Betar in Pocking–Gerry (Zelig) is second from the right in the second row from the front. Aviva is all the way to left in the third row from the front.



Figure 40 Youth movement Betar in the DP camp Pocking–Gerry is in the front row sitting second from the right

[original page 66]

In the camp, there were periodically demonstrations in support of the establishment of the State of Israel and Getzel would take the children to them.



Figure 41 Demonstration in Pocking. Arrow points to Getzel Steinberg.



Figure 42 A national committee of Brit Hatzohar (HaRevizionistim) in Pocking Nov. 14, 1946. Photo of Ze'ev Jabotinsky, in the center. Arrow highlights Getzel Steinberg.

My parents decided to emigrate up to the Land of Israel. They had experienced enough dislocation and wanted to establish a household in a state of their own. In 1949, my family made aliyah to the Land.



My uncle Getzel and Mendel and their families decided to immigrate to the US. Getzel's wife, Pesia, had family in Springfield, Massachusetts, and they were willing to receive them with open arms. Mendel immigrated to Cleveland, Ohio, where his wife Sheindel had family.*

[Original page 67]

Before Getzel immigrated to the US, a drama unfolded related to Aviva. After her liberation, Aviva was raised in the household of Getzel and Pesia as if she was a sister to their son Zelig. Getzel and Pesia intended to adopt her and take her with them to the

* Mendel's wife was related to the Greenspun family.

United States. Getzel even turned to an attorney in Munich in order to legally adopt Aviva but his request was denied. The reason provided was that Getzel already had a son and it was possible that Aviva had closer relatives than Getzel and Pesia and they might want to adopt her. In spite of this, Getzel registered Aviva's name as his daughter in his immigration papers to the US.

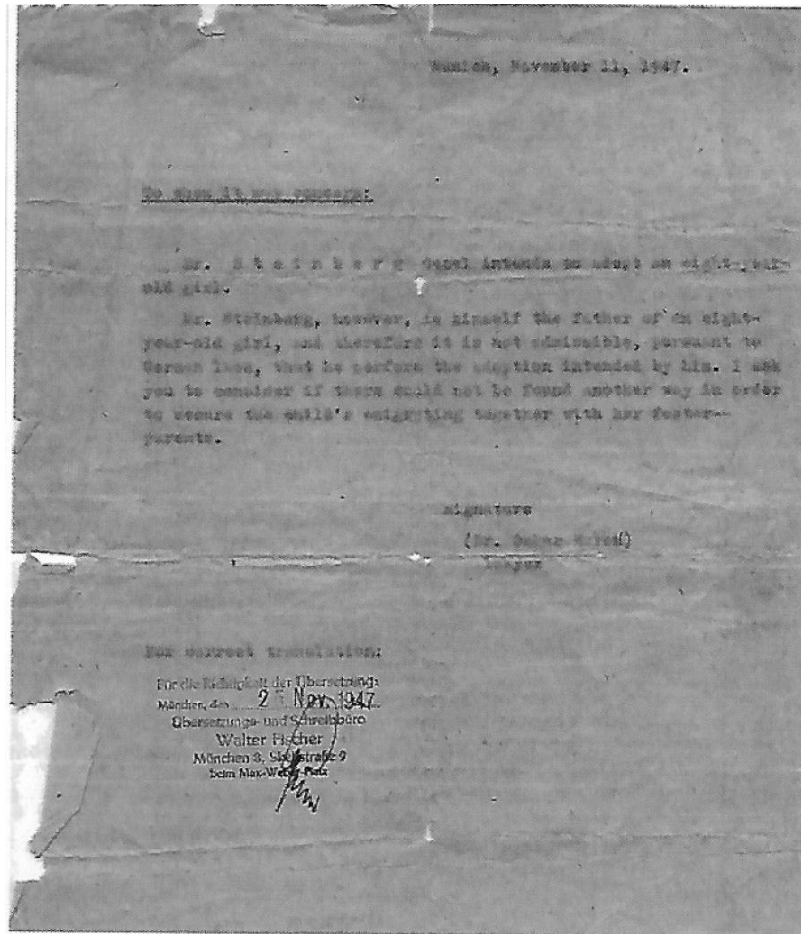


Figure 44 German letter in which Getzel requests to adopt Aviva as a daughter

Translation of Getzel's request to adopt Aviva as a daughter:

To Whom It May Concern:

Mr. Getzel Steinberg is interested in adopting an 8-year-old orphan girl. The challenge is that Mr. Steinberg is already acting like a father to this 8-year-old girl, but according to German law an adoption in this situation is not possible. I am requesting, to take into consideration in this situation to try to find and to weigh any other path to ensure the immigration of the orphan with her adopted parents. Signed Oscar Meron, attorney.

[original page 68]

One day, letters started to arrive in Pocking from Israelis who were looking for relatives who were left in Europe from war time. One of the letters, was from Shoshana Feldman, the aunt of Aviva, her father's sister, who had made aliyah to the Land of Israel in 1936.

Information had reached Shoshana that her niece Aviva survived the Shoah and was with the Steinberg family that was in the DP camp Pocking.

Aviva was the only survivor of the big Feldman family that had remained in Poland and had been annihilated in the Shoah. Shoshana was joyous that a remnant of her big family survived and she saw it as her obligation to bring her to the Land [of Israel] and raise her with her own daughters. She turned to the authorities in Pocking and requested to receive Aviva and raise her in Israel together with her family.



Figure 45 Friends in Pocking: In the center 1) Getzel and Pesia (Wurtzel) Steinberg, front 2) Zelig (Gerry) and 3) Aviva, 4) Arke Nudler and his children: 5) Moshe, 6) Yechiel, and 7) Helen (Nuderl) Fixler

When Shoshana found out that Getzel wanted to take Aviva to the US, she put to work an emissary from the Jewish Agency (HaSochnut) who was in the camp and who happened to also be a member of her kibbutz, Ein Harod, to intervene and prevent the adoption from taking place. Pesia, the wife of Getzel, was a religious woman and concluded that it was righteous for Aviva to grow up among her own close family and was willing to release the claim on Aviva, despite raising her as a daughter for several years. Aviva, for her part, wanted to remain with Getzel and Pesia, and in particular with Zelig who had become like a brother to her.

She argued that every time they took her to a new place, she had a new “aunt.” But Getzel and Pesia had no choice and they turned over Aviva, now 11 years old, to my parents who were making aliyah with the emissary of the Jewish Agency and with Aviva. Zelig remembered for many years that morning they woke him up in order to separate him from Aviva and the pain of the separation from her.

[original page 69]

A few months after my parents immigrated to Israel, Getzel, Pesia and their son Zelig immigrated to Springfield, Massachusetts; there they changed their names to George, Paula and Gerry. In the US, Getzel continued to engage in business with immigrants from Ukraine and Poland.

Zelig (now Gerry) mastered the English language in a short time thanks to the help of his American first cousins.** Over a period of years he finished his studies in his primary education and university where he studied for a degree in pharmacy. He married Barbara and they had three sons.



Figure 46 My uncle Getzel and his wife Pesia in the US

** In Springfield, the Alman family (an Americanization of the name Gelman) was related to Pesia Steinberg. Pesia's parents were Zelig and Sooreh (Sarah) Wurtzel. The maiden name of Sooreh was Gruber. Sooreh's sister was Riko Gruber who had married Joseph Alman (Gedaliah Gelman). Joseph had immigrated to the US in about 1914. His wife and children joined him after the war in 1922.



Figure 47 Family of Gerald “Zelig” Steinberg. Front, left to right, Jed, Gerry’s wife Barbara, Max, Derek, Gerald, Lila. Back row, left to right, Michael, Cindy, Samantha, Stephen, Emily, Jeni, David

My uncle, Mendel, went to Cleveland, Ohio. There he opened a butcher shop and became a butcher.

[original page 71]

Chapter Six

Making Aliyah to the Land of Israel

Acclimation and Building A Home

“Our will, in the end, is to live as free people on our own soil and to die peacefully in homeland of our own.

(Benjamin Zeev Herzl)

First steps in the Land of Israel

[original page 72]

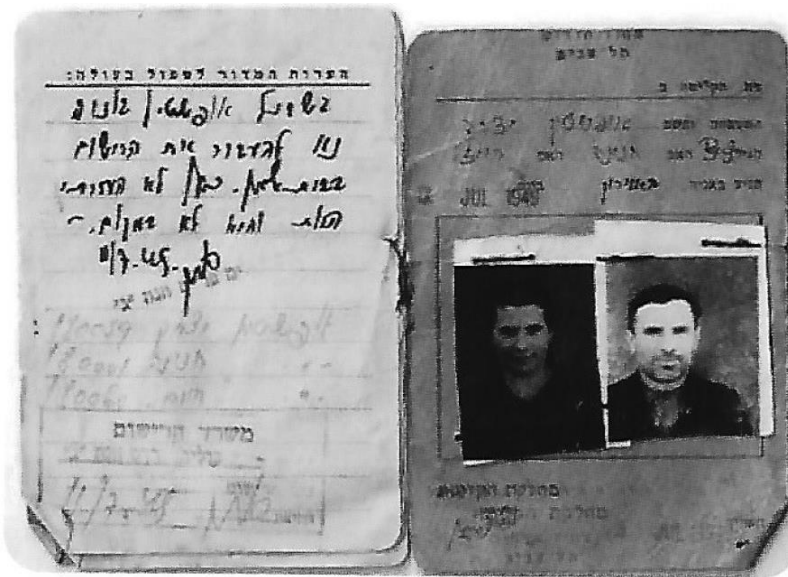
In July 1949, a number of months after the end of the War of Independence, an emissary of the Jewish Agency (HaSochnut) from Kibbutz Ein Harod brought Aviva with my parents and my two brothers, Hanina and Chaim, on a plane to Israel. In those days this was not the usual way to go to Israel. The immigrants from displacement camps came to the shores of Israel on dilapidated ships. Only immigrants with obvious health issues were brought by plane. Such was the case of my mother who was in advanced stages of pregnancy; [and thus could not handle] the voyage by ship that required a long wait until before departing from the port of Italy or France. In addition, a voyage on a ship in those days was long and very tiring and they worried that my mother would give birth during the course of the voyage. The emissary therefore decided to bring my family along with Aviva by a plane which was chartered by the Jewish Agency.

My parents came to the Land of Israel with only two haversacks. When they arrived in the Land, my parents, brothers and Aviva were brought to a camp for new immigrants in Pardes Hanna and they remained there in a tent for three days. During the night they heard howling of the coyotes and someone told my father that coyotes could eat kids. My father sat the whole night hugging the kids out of fear that the coyote might come into the tent and eat them.



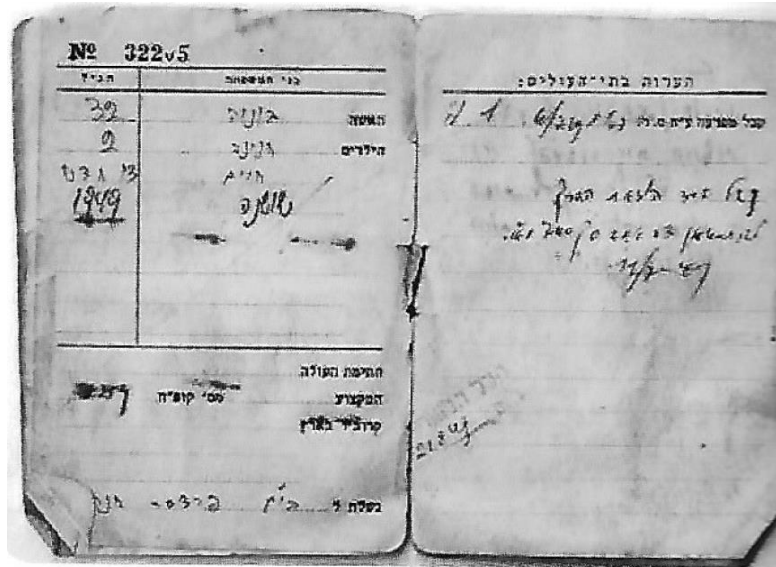
Figure 48 Immigration document of Yitzhak Upstein

[original page 73]



Immigrant documents of Yitzhak—listing all the members of the family—Yitzhak, Bunia, Hanina, Chaim.

Immigration documents of Yitzhak—details of the belongings that the family brought to the Land [of Israel] (hotplate, cooking stove, wireless radios—for all of them they had to pay duties and a luxury tax.



After three days, Shoshana, the aunt of Aviva, and her husband Shaikah, came to the camp for new immigrants and took Aviva and all my family to the Kibbutz Ein Harod. Shoshana and Shaikah had two daughters of their own who received Aviva like a sister.

Shoshana and Shaika turned their apartment, which was only one room, over to my parents and they went to sleep in playroom in the kindergarten where Shoshana was working as a kindergarten teacher. In comparison to the displaced person camps, the Kibbutz was like the Garden of Eden. Despite the simple rooms of the Kibbutz members, there were flower gardens, lawns, and a rich culture, but my parents did not

get used to Kibbutz life and after a few months moved, with the help of Shaikah, to the town of Beth Sean which was close by. Aviva remained in the kibbutz, but longed for my parents because after she was taken from Getzel's family, she viewed my parents as her close family.

[original page 74]

My father used to ride every day on his bike from Beit Shean to the kibbutz to visit her. One day Shoshana asked my father to stop his frequent visits because it prevented Aviva from getting acclimated to her new family and life in the kibbutz.

Aviva invested a great deal of effort into putting down roots in kibbutz life. During the summer she used to make frequent visits to library to read and by the start of the school year she knew how to write and speak in Hebrew. The caretakers and teachers in the Kibbutz, most of whom had also lost family in the terrible Shoah that took place in Europe, received her warmly and [offered her] a special relationship. After a bit of time, she found her way in the community of children and set down roots successfully. She grew up in the Kibbutz, studied, finished her high school studies, and enlisted in the army. During her service in army, she met Arnon Merumi from Kibbutz Mizra and she married him. In Kibbutz Mizra, their first-born daughter Merav was born. After a number of years, Aviva and Arnon transferred to Aviva's kibbutz Ein Herod and their other kids were born there: Yohai, Hillel and Nelli.



Figure 49 Aviva by a statue that she sculpted in their garden in Ein Harod, in the background my husband "Beni"



Figure 50 Arnon, husband of Aviva, Aviva and me at the wedding of my brother Anshel

The relationship between Aviva and my family endured over the years. During summer vacation, we used to spend time in the Kibbutz. When she was serving in the army, Aviva remembered to come and visit my parents. The different worldviews of Aviva, the secular woman, and my religious family, did not interfere in our relationship. As an older person, Aviva regretted that she did not spend more time with my mother. They had a partnership of fate that bound them together forever. In her own words, she loved my mother very much and saw her as a brave, strong woman who succeeded in creating a nice family with her husband "Itzik".

[original page 75]

Acclimation to Life in the Land

The town of Beit Shean in 1949,³ to which my parents came a short time after it was liberated in the War of Independence, was a town to which new immigrants came from scattered places. My parents received an Arab house made from mud.



Figure 51 Distribution of ice blocks in Bet Shean, in the beginning of the 1950s



Figure 52 Mud Houses in Bet Shean

Behind the house was an orchard of pomegranates and mulberries that we climbed on and from which we ate fruit. The house was at the entrance to what is now the entrance to the archaeological dig of Beit Shean. One day an Arab came to the courtyard of our house and claimed that we drove him out and that the house belonged to him. In the house there was no bathtub and we children used to bathe in a basin that was filled with warm water that was heated in large boilers by the fire.

³ Beit Shean – in the period of the Mandate was an Arab town. During the War of Independence on May 21, 1948, Beit Shean was occupied by the Haganah and the Arab residents who remained were moved to Nazareth. In June 1949, settlements started again by new immigrants who arrived after the establishment of the State. In 1950s–60s, a stream of immigrants continued there from Iraq, Iran and north Africa. Wikipedia.

Similarly, in the second house where we lived a short time in Beit Shean, there was no bath.

Because those were summer days, the basin was in the courtyard and we washed there. After washing up, my father used to wrap us with a towel and carry us into the house. In both houses, we used to bath outside in the summer and called this “sun bathing.”

Beit Shean was very hot during the summer. In order to reduce the heat, my mother used to put damp sheets on the floor. We also had a fan that my parents brought from Germany, but it cooled only the area adjacent to it. In the house, mice would also move about and we would hear the rustle of their legs at night. One day a snake came in the house [original page 76] and my brother thought it was a shirt thrown on the floor, he bent down to pick up whereupon the snake slithered away.



Figure 53 Beit Shean - I am in the wagon with my brothers Hanina and Chaim



Figure 54 I am in the middle. On my right is my brother, Hanina, and on my left is my brother Chaim. The 1950s in Beit Shean

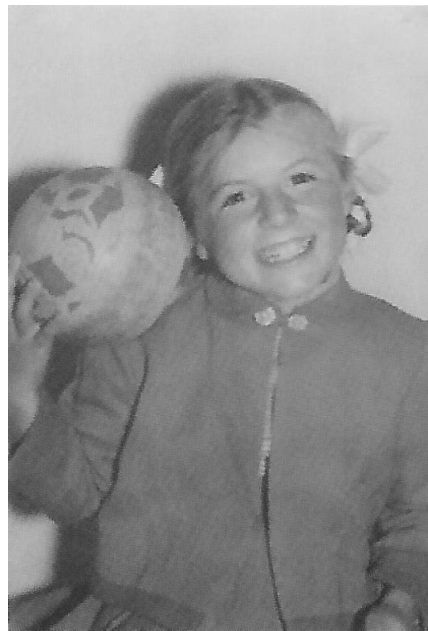


Figure 55 I am with my youngest brother Anshel

This house in Beit Shean was old and not well cared for but living there was better than living in a tent, the way many other immigrants used to live in that period.

I, Shoshana, was born in Beit Shean on December 23, 1949 and that is where I spent the first years of my childhood. My brother Anshel was born five years later in 1954.

[original page 77]



My name Shoshana came from my grandmother on my father's side and Anshel was named for our great-grandfather Anshel Eliezer. When Anshel enrolled in kindergarten and was asked his name, he was embarrassed by his "diaspora-sounding" name, Anshel, and he answered, "My name is Asher" and from then on was called Asher. This was not an offense to the memory of our forebears, because the name of my grandfather on my mother's side was Anshel-Asher. Although my mother was a very ill

woman who had high blood pressure, she took upon herself an additional pregnancy despite its danger.

In 1951, the elections for the second Israeli Knesset took place. Before the elections, party activists came to Beit Shean to convince the new immigrants to vote for the good of their parties. In realizing that the immigrants did not know their way about the political parties, they showed them which letter [denoting a party] to put on the ballot. Two such activists approached my mother and showed her the letter aleph signifying the Mapai party and said to her that this was the letter that she is obliged to put on the ballot. My mother, who was already politically knowledgeable, said to them, “You don’t tell me how to vote. I will put down what I want.” And she put down the letter Het for Herut. The only two voices supporting the Herut party in Beit Shean in the 1951 elections were the voices of my parents.

[original page 78]



*Figure 56 My father, in his youth in Beit Shean
Passport photo from his membership card in
Chupat Holin (the national healthcare system)*



Figure 57 My mother (Bunia) 1950

My father, Yitzhak, worked in construction for the company “Solel Boneh”⁴ which did construction in the Kibbutzim in the Beit Shean valley. This was very difficult work in the intense heat of the Beit Shean valley, but he loath to turn away any work. During the summer hot days, they used to cool off the workers by spraying them with water from hoses. My mother raised four kids and contributed to the family income by cooking

⁴ Solel Bonet – was established in 1924 by the General Organization of Workers (Histradut) in the Land of Israel as a cooperative of Hebrew workers for public works, with the goal of preserving the position of Jewish workers in the settlements. It was run as a business company. During the of War of Independence, the company built fortifications and water supply systems. In 1996, the company was sold Ted Arison and is today called is “Shikun & Binui” (Housing & Construction Holding Company Limited). Wikipedia.

meals for the workers. After a while my father got sick and my mother requested that Hapoel HaMizrachi, [the religious political party], of which he was a member, to see to it that my father would get an easier job and not work anymore in construction. After they rejected her request time and again, my mother realized in her pragmatic fashion that help would not be forthcoming from HaPoel HaMizrachi, and she swapped her blue identity booklet of that organization for the red ones of the General Organization of Workers (Histadrut), even though from a political perspective she was not among the supporters of the Mapai, the ruling party in the Histadrut. Thanks to his work with Solel Boneh, a Histadrut company, my parents did not have a problem getting those identity booklets. The red identity booklet opened doors for her and my father got a position as a work supervisor in Solel Boneh and he worked in that role until retirement.

In this position, my father supervised large building projects, among them a big project of the Voltex textile factory for investors from Peru in front of the hospital (Bet Holim) in Afula. In this project, he was responsible for 120 workers.

[original page 79]

Not long after we were dwelling in Beit Shean, my brother Chaim had a severe eye infection. My mother took him to the doctor's office where they asked her to leave him there for treatment. She refused and said she would care for him at home. Afterwards, we heard that (Ashkenazim) children would vanish from this doctor's office when they were left for treatment.

From my perspective as a young girl, life in Beit Shean was wonderful. In the beginning all the newcomers to Beit Shean were from Europe and spoke Yiddish, a language that my parents and I spoke fluently. My older brothers, 5 and 4 years old, studied in heder [traditional religious school] and thus knew how to read and write by the time they got to elementary school, [and the school] wanted to skip them into a higher grade. But my mother did not agree with that plan. Near our house were two synagogues, one for Hungarians and one for everyone else. On the Sabbaths, my mother used to take us for an outing to a spring, that today is destroyed, but in those days was full of water, like known flowing streams. We used to paddle in the creek, eat, play and have a good time. My brother threw his hat and pants into the water to see where the water would take them. Perhaps this was his method of getting rid of the beret which he didn't like to wear.

The relationship among the new immigrants in Beit Shean was good and there were many instances of mutual support.

During the 1950s, when immigrants from Morocco came to Beit Shean, transitional camps were built for them. From the already seasoned immigrants, Beit Shean women were mobilized to teach the newcomers from Morocco the customs practiced in Israel, in particular how to dress and personal hygiene. My parents set aside one room in our house for the benefit of the newcomers. Linking the living quarters to the families of immigrants gave us the opportunity to see the differences in perspective between them

and us. This family had a boy, the same age as my youngest brother Anshel, who cried all the time. It became apparent he didn't get enough food to eat, so when my mother used to make cereal for Anshel, she also made cereal for the other boy. The Moroccan family loved us very much and we used to play with their kids.

The Moroccan family also had a girl my age who sat next to me in the class. The girl was near sighted and didn't have books from which to study, because her parents did not have the ability to buy the book "Pesyiot" ("Steps"). She used to draw close to me in order to see what was in the book. This girl also got dresses from me, from the packages we got from my uncles in America. She wore the dress during the day and slept in it at night until it was worn out.

Chapter Seven
Transitions –

From Beit Shean to Afula and Afula to Haifa

“Progress is not possible without change.”

(George Bernard Shaw)

[original page 82]

Childhood in Beit Shean

As kids, we studied in government-religious school during our years of studying in the education system. In Beit Shean it was called “Tachacmoni” under the leadership of the principal Bar Ilan. In those days, the pupils did not get learning materials from the school, only small sacks of milk to drink. My older brother was very mischievous and when he started first grade, my parents bought him a satchel, study books and other necessary items. When he came home from school, he climbed a tree and left his satchel at the bottom; when he came down the briefcase had disappeared. Of course, my parents had to buy him all the necessities all over again.

I began first grade at age five and a half, and remember my teacher, Haya Grantzir, whose parents had a kerosene store in Beth Sean. In addition to my being young age-wise, I was also small for my age. In grade school, they used to weigh and measure the kids and found I was short and thin for my age. The nurse from the school arranged a visit to our home and discovered my mother lying sick in bed. My mother had gotten very ill after she carried out an extensive cleaning project of our house. This is what happened:

My parents bought a new house in Afula and moved from their home in Beit Shean. In the intervening period before the move to Afula, my parents rented a stone house in Beit Shean where we lived for several months. The first nights we slept in that house, my little brother cried a lot. One night my parents turned on the light to find out what was bothering him and they discovered the ceiling was black from fleas which were apparently biting him. The following morning, my mother took out all the furnishings and began a foundational cleaning. The difficult work caused her blood pressure to rise dramatically and she was not able to stand on her feet. They took her out of the house on a stretcher and a doctor saved her by letting her blood. In addition to my mother’s illness, my brother, Chaim, had undergone an eye operation in Afula and my father stayed next to his bed.

The nurse grasped the difficult situation in the house and she understood that my mother could not take care of me and she recommended sending me to a convalescence institute in Carmel, where there was good, healthy food that would enable me to gain weight and perhaps I would grow in stature.

In the recovery institute, they took my clothes away from me (they were too nice) and gave me a long dress. In this dress, with my light eyes and light hair, I looked like a non-Jew and they called me “shiksila”. My memories of that convalescent home are very painful. I longed for home. Every morning after we got up, washed and got dressed, we went down the steps to the dining room, singing the song, “Get up lazy boy and go to work.”

[original page 83]

Everyone was singing and I would be crying, because I knew that waiting in the dining room was the hated cereal, which they forced me to eat. This cereal had clumps. Every time one got stuck in my throat, I threw up everything I ate. When refusing to eat, they put me in a storage room with a smell of kerosene and took me out only after I would eat. This nightmare used to repeat itself every morning. In the afternoon meal, they used to provide jelly. This was a new food to me and its trembling appearance repulsed me and I didn't want to eat that either. When an acquaintance of my parents came to visit me and brought me chocolate, they took the chocolate from me on the pretext that I could eat it only after eating the healthy cereal and be satiated. I was there three weeks and did not gain even a gram of weight. After the doctor examined me and found that there was no improvement in my condition, he decided I should be there another three weeks. My mother came to visit infrequently and my longing for home made me cry bitterly every night in my bed. When finally in the end I came home, I ate whatever they gave me and then gained weight; and according to my mother, "I looked like the doll with the rosy cheeks that I received from America."

A Period of Austerity and Packages From America

The period of the 1950s were years of "austerity".⁵ We received help with food from our "relatives" in Ein Harod, and from others in Kefar Yehezkel. When my "uncle" Shaikah [Aviva's uncle] came to Beit Shean to help my parents with bureaucratic matters, he would bring chickens with him. My mother used to travel to Kefar Yehezkel and bring back a crate with chickens; she used to keep one chicken for us and sell the others to neighbors. One chicken was the basis of the dishes we ate the entire week. One day my mother bought two apples which were very expensive because they had come from outside of Israel. She ate one apple because she was pregnant with my young brother since she needed to be fortified and the second apple was for me so I would get stronger.

[original page 84]

We received packages from the US from our uncle Mendel from Cleveland. The day that a package arrived was a holiday. We joyously tried on the new clothes that arrived in the package. In addition to the clothes, the package also contained cans of meat and coffee, or cacao or cinnamon. Inside the coffee cans, dollar bills were sometimes buried. One day a neighbor came in and asked my mother what we got in the package this time. My mother told her and I added that inside the coffee was dollars. My parents

⁵The period of the Austerity—a period of contraction in staples that resulted from the government's economic policy during 1949–59. The goal of the policies was to increase foreign currency reserves by curtailing the purchase of food from outside of Israel. Every citizen was assigned to a Hanut Makolet (ma and pa groceries) where they lived, and there could buy food items with stamps that every family got in its personal ledger for this purpose. The black market in such items flourished as a result of this policy. There was also a limit on money a person could take outside of Israel. Wikipedia.

were angry with me and told me not to mention it again because holding foreign currency was forbidden in that period.



Figure 58 The post office in Beit Shean, which today serves as a museum

My mother brought coffee to doctors in order to get our medical issues treated favorably, and my parents drank the substitute coffee “Tsikuria”. In the packages, there were also medicines—we didn’t know what they were. When my little brother (Anshel) was hospitalized in the Afula hospital because of a severe ear infection and he was hovering between life and death, my mother brought the medicine to the hospital and it became clear that the capsules were antibiotics, medicine that was not yet present in Israel. My brother was treated with the antibiotics and got well. When other ill persons found out that we had a treasure of antibiotics, they began to come to us with requests for their needs and my mother gave it to them with pleasure. Many of the garments that came in the packages served us well for many years. Only when I reached the age of 12 did they start to buy me clothes.*

[original page 85]

* Editor’s note: Charles remembers his mother sewed him winter pants from an old blanket that they had brought from Germany.

Life in Afula

In 1955, we moved to Afula and there I started second grade. My father continued to work in Beit Shean and to commute there every day. Afula was more comfortable for us. We lived there in a duplex with a garden and a tub in the house.*



Figure 59 From right to left—Anshel, Shoshana, Haim-1956

Our neighbors in the duplex were from the founders of Moshav Tel Adashim. They were secular and even in your face anti-religious. They would eat pork, and bread on Passover, and they would invite me to eat with them. On Shabbat, they would blare loud music and did laundry. In spite of this, we had an excellent neighborly relationship. Our neighbors' daughter would eat with us. During the holiday of Sukkot, they used to be guests in our sukkah; after we moved to Haifa, we would be their guests in Afula and they treated us with honor without wounding our religious sensibility: with Kosher food from cans and disposable utensils. Even today we continue the relationship with their children. On vacation, we also used to travel to Shoshana and Aviva in Ein Harod.

My parents raised us children to love humankind, our people and our land. My mother was a good listener, a shoulder to lean on, for anyone who asked, and always offered good advice and material help. My mother was a role model to emulate for us children, from whom we learned to listen to everyone and to help anyone in need.

One of her birthdays, I wrote a poem in her honor that expressed my admiration of her personality and her willing generosity.

[original page 86]

*Editor's note: Charles remembers they had their first real sit-down toilet here.

Giving

To give with all one's *lev* (heart)
To everyone who asks, with complete *ohav* (love)
To give with *ahava* (love)
with all one's *neshama* (soul)
To give support to *mishpacha* (family)
And advice to everyone who *derisha* (asks)
To give charity to a hand *mosh-tah* (extended)
And a blessing for *simha* (joyous occasion).
To give without *le-ut* (getting tired)
And with great *savlanut* (patience).
To a boy who is *ha-rach* (young).
And to the grandfather who is *nit-mach* (stooped)
To a heart that is *do-ave* (broken)
And to a soul in *co-ave* (pain)
To give *me-atz-mech* (of yourself)
With all your *otz-mah* (strength)
Every hour *ha-ye-me-mah* (day or night)
Until the end of one's *neshama* (one's life)

I have clear memories from the Sinai War⁶ that broke out at the end of Oct. 1956. In this period, there were no shelters in Afula and even though the war started in the Sinai, we

⁶ The Sinai War—a short war that took place between Israel, France and Britain against Egypt. The background to the war was the activity of Fedayim (terrorists) who used to infiltrate from the Gaza Strip and commit murderous acts and the destruction of property in Israel, the buildup of the Egyptian military and the Egyptian closing of Straits of Tiran to the ships of Israel, an act that closed the port of Eilat. Act and strike against the Eilat. France and Britain were also entangled in the war against the background Egypt nationalizing the Suez canal (a large percentage of stock shares were in the hands of Britain and France). The safe passage in the Canal was important to them for strategic and economic reasons and they wanted to control it. During the course of the war, Israel conquered the Sinai Peninsula, but they were forced to withdraw under pressure of the United Nations and United States.

received instructions to dig holes that would serve as hiding places in a time of need. We lived close to the road between Afula-Tiberias and we saw many tanks passing in the area. There was also much activity in the military airport of Ramat David near Afula.

My mother considered it very important to be aware of what was happening in the area and she regularly read the daily newspaper (“Letste naves”).⁷

[original page 87]

We children read the weekly children “Devar liyeladim” (Word for Children)⁸ in which appeared the first original stories in Hebrew for kids. Children’s literature during that period was meager and it was mostly based on translations from other language. We were able to obtain the Devar Yeladim because my parents were members of Histadrut and because of my father’s work in Soleh Boneh.

In my childhood in Afula, I particularly remember the wonderful field trips in the Jezreel Valley which drew me close to nature. On the Sabbaths, we used to go by foot to Givat HaMoreh. When we reached the summit, we felt like we conquered a mountain. In school fieldtrips, we used to go by foot to Mount Tabor. We would walk singing the song “On the way to Tabor, I went alone....”. The classes in the government-sponsored religious school were coed. Boys and girls would out on fieldtrips together and while we traveled on an [open-bed] truck, we would fall against one another and laugh. The girls wore long or short pants with elastic. All this changed when we moved to Haifa.

The Move to Haifa–The Acclimation of My parents

In 1962, we moved to Haifa, because my parents wanted to provide the children a good education and in the bigger city there were possibilities. On the advice of friends in the city, my parents purchased a condo on Hativat Golani St.

Studies in High School–Hardship and Competition

In Haifa, I began my studies in 9th grade in the high school “Etzion” which was for girls only, who were forbidden to wear pants, and only allowed a skirt. At first, my mother had enrolled me in the school “Alliance” on Yaluk Street, but when it became clear to her

⁷ “Letste naves” –was an Israeli newspaper in Yiddish (the latest news). The newspaper appeared between 1949-2006. In the beginning it was a weekly, and after that it appeared twice a week. In 1957, it became a daily. It was very popular very between among Yiddish readers and helped immigrant readers of that language to get integrated in the State. With the diminishment of Yiddish readers, the newspaper returned to a weekly, until it closed in 2006.

⁸ “Word For Children”– Devar LeYeladim (A Word for Kids) appeared in 1936. In the weekly appeared a series of comics drawn by caricaturist, Aryeh Navon, with serialized stories written by Nahum Gutman, before they were published as books. In the weekly were different sections in which were published poems and stories of the best Israeli poets and storytellers of that time. In 1985, Devar LeYeladim merged with the weekly “Al HaMishmar” and “HaEretz Shelanu (Our Land)” and appeared under the name “Kulanu (All of Us). Wikipedia

that the school was not religious she transferred me to study at “Etzion” that was across from “Alliance.”

[original page 88]

This school was in the “Erdstein House”⁹ on Yud Lamed Peretz Street in Hadar [a section of Haifa] and when we got to the tenth grade its name was changed to Municipal High School 6 and it was moved to another building in Neve Yosef in Haifa (at that time they had started to open the municipal schools).

The move to Haifa was accompanied by a significant hardship for me. In Afula, I was an excellent student with several grades of “Excellent” in my certificate and I successfully passed the survey examinations, which was the condition to be accepted into high school. In fact, my parents had received the recommendation to send me to the Evilina de Rothchild school in Jerusalem, but the studies there required boarding and my parents didn’t want me to learn in a boarding school. In Haifa, the studies were at a much higher level than in Afula and it was difficult for me to close the gap. The teachers for their part did not encourage us to succeed.

Studies in Teachers College (Seminar) and the Beginning of a Teaching Career

After I finished my studies in high school, I did not go to the army even though I was in the youth movement “Ezra” and wanted to go to [an army group called] Nahal. My mother was against my going to the army because at that time she had two sons who were serving in the army, which was sufficient as a source of worry. Near the high school was a teaching college called “Bin Nun”,¹⁰ where I was accepted and where I spread my wings.

I had an outstanding teacher, Tsipporah Golan, who encouraged me in everything, and through her merits, I became a teacher. The difference between how teachers treated me in the teaching college versus high school, taught me an important lesson for my future career as a teacher. A child flourishes when seen up close and when given a warm shoulder.

After finishing my studies at the teacher’s college, supervisors arrived to embed new teachers at schools needing to improve their teaching quality. I was placed in a school in Metula that was very weak [Hebrew idiom: “which stood on the legs of a chicken”] and needed new teachers. Despite the challenge, I requested a school close to Haifa,

⁹ Erdstein House – At Erdstein House, in the 1960s, the University Institute of Haifa was established and in the end became Haifa University. Today a Hebrew language school (ulpan) takes place there.

¹⁰ The teacher’s college “Ben Nun” was established in 1951 by Dr. Yehezkiel Ben Nun and located on Yud Lamed Gimel street in the Hadar neighbor of Haifa. There was a two year path there to certification to be teacher and teach kindergarten. In 1965, it moved to Nave Sha'anani street. In 2002, it was known as an academic institute. Today the college is known as an uplifting religious academic college of education.

because my mother was sick and I wanted to be close to home. I was assigned a school in Shlomi and I worked there three good and wonderful years.

[original page 89]

Hanina and Chaim in High School

My brother Chaim did not study in Haifa but rather in Midreshet Noam,¹¹ in Pardes Hanna. He was accepted to the Midrasha because of his success on the qualifying exams. The teaching relationship towards him was different than I received in municipal high school 6. He received much encouragement and was looked upon as a model for success as a boy who came from a hick town and but completed his studies with success. In that period, Midreshet Noam was an intermediate and prestigious yeshiva where they taught the religious elite, such as the son of the State's inspector general, Nevatzel. My brother studied there in a residential setting.



Figure 60 In the center, my brother Hanina, a soldier in the infantry.

I am on the left and my brother Anshel is to our right. 1967

Hanina studied in the Yavneh high school. My mother sent him for private tutoring in math and he did well in the formal sciences. He struggled with his English studies and

¹¹ "Midreshet Noah"– was established in 1945 by Israel Sadan and Michael Tzur who were leaders of youth movement called Noar Mizrachi ("Noam") with rabbi Yeshoa Yigal. The purpose was to give pride to religious youth through a values oriented education and by steeping them in advanced secular and religious studies. Their goal was to prepare the religious youth for a life of contribution in the community and the Country. In 2007, the Midreshet merged with middle school Kiryat Yaakov Herzog in Kefar Saba, and became a new Noam academy.

said that if he wanted to learn English he would go to the United States, as he in fact did much later.

[original page 90]

We matured in Haifa close to other survivors from Volyn. For us, they were like our close family. There was a covenant of brotherhood between survivors. When we got together, we hugged each other and related to each other as brother and sister.

Chapter 8:

Establishing a Family and Building a Career in Teaching

“The family is one of nature’s masterpieces”

(George Santayana)

[original page 92]

Meeting Beni, Marriage and the Establishing of a Family

During the time that I worked in Shalomi, I would go every day to my parents' house in Haifa, out of concern for my mother's well-being.

In the third year working at Shalomi, I met Beni and after a period of getting to know one another, we married.

Birth of Children

Our children grew up in the orbit [Hebrew literally "in the lap of"] of a religious Zionist education and were active in Bnei Akiva.

Our oldest daughter Chaya was born 44 years ago during the Yom Kippur War.¹²

My husband Beni was called to reserve duty and was stationed in Ramat Aviv. Chaya was a "premi," born during the seventh month of the pregnancy. Her premature birth was due to the events that I experienced that day: there was a warning siren [signaling war] and one of the neighbors climbed up on an electrical wire and got electrocuted. I was shaken by the events and contractions engulfed me. Chaya was born in Elisha Hospital, but because she was a premi and her hemoglobin was low, it was necessary to transfer her to Rambam hospital because they had a premi unit and could care for her.

The stay in Rambam hospital was a nightmare; the hospital was mobilized for war needs and was closed for citizens. To my good fortune, Ruti, the wife of a man who worked at the cooling company where my husband Beni worked, was a doctor at Rambam and she was able to arrange that Haya be transferred there and ensured we would get permission to enter the hospital. Due to [my daughter's] Chaya's condition, we did not buy anything right after the birth. Only after my mother saw that the girl was viable did we go out and buy baby items. Ruti was surprised that we called our daughter "Chaya-Leah" at a time when all girls being born were being called Maya, an acronym for the Yom Kippur War. "Why didn't you call her 'Maya' like everyone else?" she asked. I explained to her that I called her Chaya, which is the name of my grandmother who perished in the Shoah and Leah in memory of one of my father's sister, who also perished in the Shoah

[original page 93]

¹² Yom Kippur War—a war that broke out on Yom Kippur Jewish Year 5734 (October 6, 1973) when a coalition of Arab state under the leadership of Egypt and Syria attacked the State of Israel. The war continued until October 24, 1973. The war surprised the State of Israel and took place principally in the Sinai and Golan Heights. After recovering from the initial surprise, Zahal [the Israeli army] overcame the Arab armies. The war had many political implications and it also paved the way to conclude peace between Israel and Egypt. Wikipedia

Three years after Chaya's birth, my son Avi was born. Beni was again called up to reserve duty. During Passover eve when I was with my parents, I felt the first contractions, but only at the end of Passover did the birth take place. He was named for my husband's grandfather. During that period, I was working in a school in Rechasim. In Rechasim, I worked 5 wonderful years. I had a close relationship with the students and their parents which has remained in essence until today.

Work in Education in the School Carmel

In 1976, after Avi was born, I began to teach in the "Carmel" school in the Ahuza area on Carmel. Before I received my work, I was consulted my mentor from the seminar and she convinced me to take the position. My first year working there was extremely hard. I was the youngest teacher by far in the faculty. After the first year, I requested a transfer to another school, but the supervisor refused to move me and succeeded in convincing me that the second year would be much easier and I would have more success and that is what happened.

I transferred my children to the school where I was teaching. I felt that way more comfortable that my children were traveling with me and not having to cross busy streets that my kids were traveling with me and did not have to cross busy roads on the way to the school in Kiryat Eliyahu.



Figure 61 My father, Isaac, at the Bar Mitzvah of his son, Avi



Figure 62 Avi, my son with his grandfather Yitzhak on the day of his Bar Mitzvah, 1989.

Much later we went to live in Carmel where we still live now. I taught in that school until I retired. In my 24 years working in that school, I taught many students from the neighborhood and the surroundings, a number of them today hold key public and government positions. These were wonderful and productive years.

During the period I worked at the Carmel School, ten years after Avi was born, my youngest daughter Yifat was born.



Figure 63 Beni my husband and me with children of Yifat. The baby Elishav, Tehila, Uryeh, Tiferet, Tahya



Figure 64 I am holding my grandson Elishav, the son of my daughter Yifat on the day of his bris



Figure 65 My oldest grandson Benaya, Beni, me, Avyah, and Uri from the front—Tiferet, Tehila, Sirah, Teheya, Nizan, and Urya

[original page 95]

My children: Chaya, Avi, Ifat and their families.

My oldest daughter, 44, married Hagi Apalker, whom she met in the youth movement Bnei Akiva.



Figure 66 My mother at the wedding of our daughter Chaya



Figure 67 My parents at the wedding of my daughter Chaya–1966

Hagi works as deputy principle of a school in a religious settlement in Gush Shagav where he is finishing his master's degree. Hagai works as an accountant [and later became a lawyer]. Chaya and Hagi have six kids. Beniya (named for my mother)–is a soldier in Givati, Hadas finished two years of civil duty, Aviya–is in 12th grade, Ori is an excellent student in 10th grade, the last beloved ones, Shira– studying in 5th grade and Nisan–studying in the 4th.



Figure 68 Family of my oldest daughter Chaya. Right to left: Uri, Avyah, Hadas, Shira, Haya, and her husband Hagi, Nisan, and Banya.

[original page 96]

My son Avi, 42, is married to Orit whom he met in our house. Orit was a leader in the youth movement “Bnei Akiva” and during the time she did her civil service she worked in the school where I was teaching and visited our home. Avi was a guide and very active in Bnei Akiva and there he met Orit and they married at a young age. Avi was studying in Haifa in a yeshiva with a high school in Kefar HaRoeh, and after that in yeshiva HaHesder by the settlement Otniel south of Mt. Hebron.

During the period he was at Yeshiva HaHesder, we travelled to visit him, despite the danger of the trip. This was a period of numerous terrorist incidents. Avi served in the army in Givati and in the War of Lebanon he was called to reserves at the Karkom base near the Lebanese border. Avi and Orit live in Kiryat Netafim in Samaria. Avi studied electricity in Ariel University and does electrical work. Uri works in the non-formal educational system of Petak Tikvah. They have three children: Adi, in 12th, Devir-Yitzhak in 7th, and Yaneer in kindergarten.

My daughter Ifat, 32, married Moshe and they live in Kiryat Shmuel. Ifat finished her masters and works as a teacher. Her husband Moshe also is in education. Ifat and Moshe have six children: Tehilla, 13, Tiferet, 12, Tehiya, 10, Uriah, 8, Elishiv, 5, and Amichai, 3.



Figure 69 Aminov family, family of Ifat. Right to left– Tiferet, Amichai, Yifat, Tehilla, Uriah, Tehiya, and behind them Moshe



Figure 70 The family of my son Avi. From right to left Adi the first born, 17, Orit his wife, Avi, my son, and Yanir in his arms and in the middle Devir.

Chapter Nine:

My brother Hanina, Chaim and Anshel and Their Families

“A brother—one with whom to share memories of childhood and dreams of youth”

[original page 98]

When my brothers were mobilized for the army and returned with uniforms, my parents were filled with pride mixed with worry that ate at their heart.

Both my brothers participated in the Six Day War. After we didn't hear anything from them during the period of the War, my mother went to the officer of the town to find out what happened to them. The officer of the city told her, that if she didn't hear anything, that was a sign that everything was okay and she should calm down. Because of worry over their wellbeing, she got diabetes.

During the Six Day War, my brother Hanina was in Tal brigade.¹³ Many of his friends were killed and he returned from the war shell shocked. During this time, they didn't understand this phenomenon or know how to care for it. My parents thought that going abroad would improve his situation and sent him to my uncle Getzel in Massachusetts; afterwards, Hanina went to my uncle Mendel in Cleveland. Mendel sent him to study in the University. Hanina finished his studies there in industrial engineering and administration; he established a family with his wife Saralee and two children were born to them. A daughter, Nili, and a son Jonathan.

Nili, now age 38, is married to Etan who is a cardiologist. She is a president of "Hadassah"¹⁴ in Nashville and loves Israel a great deal.

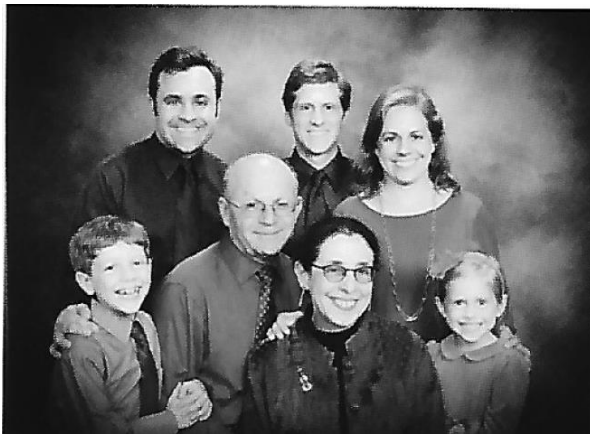


Figure 71 Family of my brother Hanina in the US. Top row—daughter Nili and her husband Etan, son Jonathan; bottom: granddaughter Gila, his wife Saralee, my brother Hanina and grandson Noam



Figure 72 The musicians in the family of my brother Hanina: the grandkids: Gila and Noam and son Jonathan

¹³ The Tal battalion during the Six Day War– the 84th battalion took over south of peninsula Gaza Strip, entered Rafah and El-Arish. After armored battles against the Egyptian army, they arrived to the banks of the Suez Canal. Wikipedia

¹⁴ The Hadassah movement in the US—is the union of the Zionist women in the US. This organization establishes medical centers in Israel, sponsor youth groups and in the US set up educational activities and cultural branches.

[original page 99]



Figure 73 A ceremony recognizing Nili, daughter of my brother Hanina, as president of Hadassah in Nashville in the US. My brother Hanina on the left. [Ed. granddaughter in front of podium]



Figure 74 Left to right: Noam and Gila, grandchildren of my brother Hanina in the US

Jonathan is a gifted violinist, he graduated from Princeton and works at Microsoft. Jonathan is not married.*

My brother Chaim works as an accountant. He lives in Israel, is married to Tirzah and has four children: Sarit, Shai, Yohanan, who work in the area of education, and daughter Ruti who suffers from Down Syndrome. All of Chaim's children live in Samaria.

Sarit married Etan and they had five children. Shai married Hela, and they have five children. Hanan married Elah and they have six children. Shai and Henan live in Samaria.



Figure 75 My brother Chaim and his wife Tirzah sitting at the wedding of their first grandson Maor

* Ed: at the time of this translation he is now married.

[original page 100]

My younger brother, Anshel (Asher) travelled to visit Hanina in the US after the Yom Kippur War; he saw that everything there is sparkling and he decided to stay. Anshel lives today in Cleveland, Ohio, married for a second time to an Israeli girl named Nechama. Anshel has two sons from his first marriage. Ayal and Roan and a daughter from the second marriage: Tali.

Ron was five years in Israel. At first, he was in a religious high school (Midrasha) for Zionist leadership in Yishuv Argamon, and after serving in the army, he tried to get into the Technion but after being denied admittance, he returned to the US. During his stay in Israel, he lived with us in Haifa. In the US, Roan studied mechanical engineering and lives there.

Ayal remained in the US.

Tali married Joshua and they have two children:* Itzik and Sarah, and they too live in Cleveland.



Figure 76 My brother Anshel and his family in the US

* As of this translation, they have three children.

[original page 101]

Chapter 10

Aviva and Memory of the Shoah

The horrors of the Shoah pursue me all my days
and strengthen my opposition to hate without a no cause.

(Lutzina Belotinsky)

[original page 102]

In contrast to my mother who would recount the events of her life both to family members and investigators from Yad Yashem, and who encouraged me to pick up a pen and write about them, Aviva guarded her story in her heart and did not tell a soul.

My mother believed in the commandments: “In that day you should recount them to your children [lit. son]” [Ex. 13.4] and “Remember what Amalek did to you [Deut. 25.14];” these commandments guided her while Aviva, who arrived in the Kibbutz as a young girl and who had a strong desire to be rooted in the community of sabras [native-born Israelis], guarded her story in her heart and remained silent.

As she got older, Aviva felt the need to express her feelings and tell the story of her life. One day she appeared in our house and in her hand was a tape recorder and asked my mother to tell the story of her life and how she was able to rescue her from the Christian family. Aviva listened and recorded, but after a short time, she couldn't absorb the story anymore and exploded in a bitter cry. Aviva hugged my mother and asked her to refrain from telling the story. It pressed very deep, deep into the depths of her consciousness.

Aviva tried again to bring forth her memories and feelings through the medium of drawing. She started to draw, especially horses. The source for the inspiration to draw horses came from a photo of her mother riding on a horse and the stories that were told to her about her mother and her love for horses. The horses were transparent and through them was reflected the scenery from her childhood. The horses and scenery of her childhood helped strengthen Aviva to begin talking about her childhood and what happened to her during the darkness of the Shoah.

Aviva's drawings were exhibited in 2011 in a collective art show in Beit Gabriel, under the headline “Once I was a child,” in the catalog of the show, the drawing of the lonely horse was called, “Horse Without A Female Rider”





Figure 77 Horse Without A Female Rider



Figure 78 horses that Aviva drew ¹

[original page 103]

In the daily produced by her Kibbutz Ein Harod, on Yom Hashoah 1990, Aviva published part of the story of Bunia, my mother, about the German occupation of her village Mervits and the deeds of the Nazis in the first days of the occupation and the liquidation of the Mlynov ghetto.

When Aviva's had grandchildren, and they reached the age of bar/bat mitzvah, and began to write in school about family roots, they asked Aviva questions about her youth, the place of her birth and her parents, and they asked her to take a trip with them, a journey to her roots, to Ukraine and the areas of her childhood. The grandchildren's questions prompted Aviva to remember the hardships she went through during her childhood and tell them the story that was kept guarded in her heart for many years. When a group crystallized of people from her village who had survived, and were traveling to the city of her birth, Aviva decided to travel with her husband and two of her children on a journey of roots to Ukraine. The experience of the journey enabled Aviva to open up what had been locked in her heart, and to tell her children and her grandchildren what happened to her during the Shoah. After this trip, Aviva began to go

¹ The photos [of landscapes behind Aviva's horses] were taken from the areas of the people of Rozhyshe, <http://www.rozyszcze.org/?CategoryID=203&A>

to schools and tell students about her experiences and the story of her family, which was the story of how the Jewish people were wiped out during the Shoah and only a few survived to tell story of the entire people.

Chapter Eleven:

My Parents' Golden Age and Memory of the Shoah

The Shoah is like a deep hole that every time we get closer to it, it is impossible to fathom how deep it is. Only from a distance is it possible to see how vast the horror.

(Rabbi Yisrael Lowe)

[original page 106]

The experience was etched in our flesh because we were the second generation to the Shoah. My mother, may she rest in peace, used to wake up at night screaming with fright. In her dreams, all the dread returned from the period of the Shoah. In spite of this, she was an optimistic person and embraced life.

My father, although he didn't personally experience all the hardships that were visited on his family and the people of his town, was a sad person and embittered all his life. He didn't want to celebrate a bar or bat-mitzvah with us because we didn't have family to celebrate with us for such an event. He did not want to spend time doing things and swore off any pleasure. Being the only one who survived from his family made him remorseful which accompanied him his whole life; he felt guilty that he was not with his family during the difficult times.



Figure 79 My uncle Mendel and my father in our Sukkah in Ahuza, winter 1985

My mother, by contrast, loved the beautiful life and saw us, the family she raised, as revenge against the Nazi enemy. She used to often say, "The people of Israel lives and exists" (Am Yisroel Hai veKayam).



Figure 80 My mother with grandchildren Nili and Jonathan the children of Hanina and Saralee



Figure 81 My father and mother in our house

[original page 107]

Kol Yisrael radio broadcast a program for many years in Hebrew and Yiddish with a section for finding relatives which was heard by many in Israel and beyond. One day, a local person called my parents and excitedly told them that he heard the following message: “Moishe is seeking his sister Bunia Upstein.” He thought the person referenced was a relative of my mother and hurried to tell her. In fact, my mother was called “Bunia Upstein” after her marriage, but she did not have a brother named Moshe. But my father had an uncle Moshe and thanks to this message my father discovered his uncle who had established a family after the Shoah, and in this way found a cousin, Yehudit Wurtzel, who was divorced and had a child and was living in Haifa. My parents of course connected with her and invited her to live in their home and helped her to get married again.



Figure 82 The uncle of my father Moshe Kugel, his wife Hannah, and their daughter Mali, who were found via the program “Searching for Relatives” on the radio.



Figure 83 My father Yitzhak Upstein with some of his great-grandchildren – Hadas, Binaya, the children of Chaya my oldest daughter, Sarit, the daughter of my brother Chaim, with her two older children, Maor and Safir.

My parents were fortunate enough to see us marry, and to see our children, their grandchildren. My father, may peace be upon him, succeeded in living a long life, and also saw great-grandchildren.

[original page 108]

My mother, may peace be upon her, passed away on the 28th of Sivan 5755 (June 26, 1995) at the age 82 after suffering many years from high blood pressure and a heart ailment. The 26th of June was [also] the date of my anniversary in the non-Hebrew calendar [i.e. the Gregorian calendar].

After she passed away, my father, may peace be upon him, came to live with us in our home. The deep sadness that dwelled with him all his life after the Shoah, just became stronger after my mother's death.

With the help of heaven

My dear grandfather Itcik!

Behold, 90 years have passed,
And you have been favored to see
Children, grandchildren, and great
grandchildren,
Entire generations pass
before your eyes,
and on this tree
is beautiful sweet fruit.

We wish you to be favored
with many more springs
to enjoy all your family's offspring
and be favored with complete joy
and we have no doubt that
grandmother, Bunia
may her memory be a blessing,
will now enjoy together with you.

“Lag-Gal”² and about this it is said,
“Lift (gal) up your eyes and behold the
wonders (niflaot) of your Torah?” (Ps.
119:18)

And who, if not you, in Torah and
prayers (tephilot), steeped in truth and
belief.

Therefore, dear grandfather
There is nothing else for us to say but
you are more dear to us than any
guard
May it be the will that you fulfill all
your wishes and be favored with
happiness and pleasure (nachas).

Our wishes with love: Chaim, Tirzah, Hanan,
Ruti, Shai, Hila, Hadar, Sarit, Etan, Maor, Moshe, and Sapir.

² The poem is punning on “Lag” as in the holiday “Lag BaOmer”, the date of his birth, and Gal, which means lift up.

Blessing of the grandchildren for my father Yitzhak on his 90th birthday.

In our eyes the time he lived with us was a nice period. He lived in our home, surrounded by people and went with us to all the family affairs; we took him where we went.

[original page 109]

My father did not speak much. I know that he loved me very much and appreciated everything we did for him.

In his eyes, the most important was to fulfill his religious faith. In our family there was a tradition to go every year to go to Karei Deshe near the Sea of Galilee; of course my father went with us. When my brother asked him how he spent his time, he used to answer that it was wonderful, because there was prayer and Torah discussion. When he would eat, he used to say, “I eat in order to say a blessing, not to satisfy my appetite.”

My father was strict about daily praying daily in the minyan (quorum) in the shul and to observe all the fast days. He became a symbol of devotion and strict fulfillment of all the commandments in the congregation “Young Israel” in Romema in Haifa. The entire congregation bestowed honor on him with no restraint and members of the congregation helped him to get to shul morning and evening. The young people in the shul honored him, and learned from him a what is devotion and faith and to give honor in their relationships to elders.

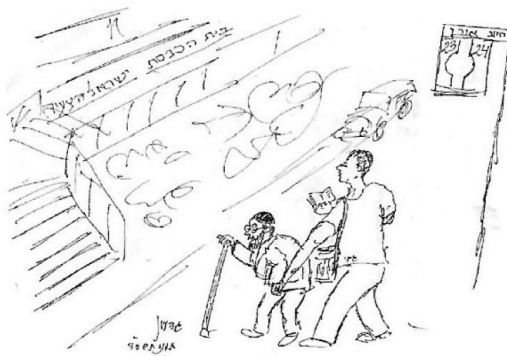


Figure 84 The same artist drew father when one of the prayer attendees helped and cared for him along the way to the shul



Figure 85 A drawing of my father, may he rest in peace, by Gideon Kuperstock, a member of the congregation in the shul. *

* The text in the drawing reads: R' Yitzhak, father of Shoshana Baruch during a post-wedding ritual of Seven Blessings (Sheva Berachot)

On rainy days, the members of the congregation organized the required quorum (minyan) in our house, so that my father would be able to pray on Shabbat eve in a quorum (minyan).

[original page 110]

But devotion to his faith cost me dearly one time. One day they brought him back from shul and he had trouble going up the steps. I helped him to go up and needed to have him lean on me on every step. It was very hard for me and I said to him, “Abba if you are going to be stubborn about going to shul every day maybe we should put you in a senior living facility, which makes the shul close to where you are living.” He was very insulted and said: “You feel loathing towards me?” I couldn’t stop crying. Truly, to honor one’s father and mother is a challenging commandment.

One Friday evening, close to his passing, he sang [Shabbat] songs, and went to bed. In the morning, he was feeling poorly; I heard his labored breathing and called an ambulance. They succeeded in reviving him and he spent five more weeks in Carmel hospital sedated and on life support. Members of the community came to talk to him and sing for him.

My father passed away in his sleep from old age in 2004 when he was 94. When he passed away, they paid him great honor; they brought him to the courtyard of the shul, and Rabbi Daniel Herskovitz, the uncle of my son-in-law, the husband of Chaya, eulogized him. In his passing, he left a loving family: 3 sons, a daughter, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

I cherish and give thanks to our congregation “Young Israel”, for the relationship and honor they extended my father in his life and death.

[original page 111]

The eulogies said at the burial of my parents: Bunia and Yitzhak Upstein

“A woman of valor who can find?” (Proverbs 31:10) in memory of Bunia (Upstein), daughter of Chaya and Anshel Steinberg

Written by Shoshana (Upstein) Baruch and was at the grave side Bunyia (Steinberg) Upstein the day of her burial, 28th of Sivan, 5755.

Aleph: “A woman of valor who can find?

Trusting in her is the heart of her husband” (baalah) (Prov. 31:10-11)

– a support in his life—the only one (ha-yehida)

Bet: Bunya, the daughter of Chaya

and Anshel, the courageous (ha-amitsah)

Gimel: Large (gedolah) in life and like no other (kemocha),

exemplar of good deeds and truth in her life (chayeha).

Dalet: You taught (derasha): “Goodness and knowledge you taught me (lamdani)”,
because an orphan, am I (hanani).

Hay: She was like (hayita) a merchant ship, surviving life no matter what (yehi ma),
even the inferno which is terrible (hanorah)

Vav: There was a day that her vows were fulfilled (kaiyimah)

to save the soul of a Jewish woman (yehudiah)

Zayin: Time for herself she never found (matzeah), the family first and help for any
in need (nidcah)

Chet: A rule guided her life (hayecha),

truth and justice alone did she seek (hibshah)

Tet: Wonderful like no other (camoha),

a listening ear and good advice (etza)

to any who asked for it.

Yud: She knew hardship and wandering all her life (chayeha),

Through the terrible inferno, following a path that was not defined (derech),

to the Land she arrived quietly (cheresh).

Kaf: She set an important rule, not to give up (lihekanea).

Continue the fight, until depleted is her strength (kohoteha)

Lamed: To be satisfied with little, that was her motto (sisma)

not full of herself (lebah) and always expecting goodness (kivtah).

Mem: Carrying herself without complaining (sheket),

and satisfied with the young Country, a family was regenerated (mithadesheth).

Peace between a man a woman, she always sought (hibsha)

always offering [good] advice (yeasa).

Nun: At peace with humankind, a soul noble and wise (hochmah)

knowledge and wisdom, surrounded her (sivivah)

Samekh: Assistance to all: the sick, widows and orphans (yetomim)

people who are ill, the elderly and all the people (dychfeen)
Ayin: Help she extends for every problem (baayah),
no assignment (betalah) did she refuse (bahalah).
Pay: With a face that is smiling (mehayachot).
she hid the pain, always had a smile (lehayech).
Tsadi: “With a pinch to the cheek”, that is what she said (amrah),
she hid her pain (keavah).
Kuf: Close to anyone who called her (koreya)
Holy was her life, she helped any who requested it (lemevaksheha).
Raysh: Many women achieved valor (chayel)
but you exceeded them all (kulan)
Shin: “Grace is deceitful, and beauty is vain; but a woman that feareth the Lord, she
shall be praised.” (Proverbs 31:30)
In you all these things combined (yahdav),
the grace and the beauty, the reverence and holiness (kedusha)
Tav: Pure in heart (lebech),
and your ways (darkech)
will be a candle to light our path.

[original page 112]

[The eulogy that I gave at the burial of my father Yitzhak, may peace be with him.](#)

My dear father, this separation is difficult.

It is hard to get up in the morning and not accompany you to and from prayers, to eat meals every morning, noon and night together.

It is difficult for us to pass the room full of holy books where you spent hours on top of hours.

The past nine years we were together and we tried not to leave you alone too much. Also, if we went for vacation, you were with us. You were part of us and our community.

The years of your youth passed in wars and wandering.

When you were only seven, WWI broke out, and you transitioned from the Russian to Polish rule.

You tried to reestablish yourself, to build a family, and to continue the life of your family branches

But not many years passed and the Second World War came and in the horrible Shoah, you were entire family was wiped out. “One piece of wood survived from fire” [Zechariah 3.2], beaten up and with a wounded soul, you didn’t want to live anymore. You placed

on yourself various mortifications of the flesh: fasting on yahrzeits, not participating in happy occasions, and of course not to go out for a good time or any pleasant event.

The only support left for you was mother, daughter of your town, who gave you the bitter news of the extinction of all your family. From that moment on, you were not separated, eventually getting married and starting a new family. But the new family also was not a remedy for your wounds. You continued to be closed off and filled with sadness.

Mother stood by you all these years, stood with you against all the hardships, she established one significant [goal]: to establish a Jewish family, the celebration of Jewishness. A home for the Jewish nation, is the secret strength to the survival of the Jewish people.

A Jewish home and a happy occasion for Jewish families is our revenge against the enemy of the Jews who wanted to exterminate and erase us from the face of the earth. Therefore it is incumbent upon us to multiply our joyous occasions and expand our families; [and] to flee the bitter diaspora and to build our home in the land of our ancestors.

[original page 113]

You crossed borders days and night until you got to Germany. In Germany, you entered into marriage vows and started to build a new family— two children and a third one on the way. You came to the holy land and established yourselves together with the Nation itself.

Abba, you did not refuse any work, whether hewing stones, laying roads, construction or any heavy work, that brings honor to one who does it.

You rejoiced with the happiness of the nation, and grieved over the troubles that befell the nation.

How proud you were to see your sons in military defense of Israel, wearing the uniform of the State of Israel, and all your hopes were that there would be no more wars, and there would be peace and tranquility for the Jewish people.

Abba, in spite of all the travail and hardships that you suffered in your life, you didn't lose your faith in God, may he be blessed. Your faith was perfect and that how you raised us: You did not skip over any fast, through the last fast that you did the Fast of Ester.

You did not skip any prayer or blessing: “a person is obligated to say a hundred blessings a day,” you would say. “therefore, any pleasure like eating and drinking was for the purpose of completing a commandment (mitzvah).”

Prayer with the community “is the glorification of the King” (Proverbs 14:28)— when you were in Siberian wilderness you wandered with the Torah scroll in your arms to find other Jews to [fulfill the duty to] create a quorum (minyan) for public prayer.

And in the same way during the last days, “on all fours” and with hardship, untold hardship, you went to the shul during hot and cold, in rain or frost, going down the steps and up the steps, you did not miss one until the last rainy Shabbat eve; when Beni could not take you on the wheel chair, you tried to make a quorum (minyan) in our house, so that you could pray in a quorum, this was your will.

This is the place, perhaps, to tell of our wonderful community that was accompanied and adopted you the nine years you lived with us.

You were accepted in our community with warmth and love, patience and admiration. Even in the difficult days, they accompanied you and everyone took it upon himself to help you with prayer, even at the expense of their own prayers.

David Cahana, Uri Dhamir, Gideon and Yohanan Ganz, Gabi and Aharon, Simon Shitrit, Shlomo Cohen, David Mink, Yisrael Cohen and Semeil Cohen, Eli Marmor, Shabtai Spiegler, Alhanan Gardman, Muti Frankel, and the children and of course the family Alpeger – our dear in laws.

[original page 114]

We also will not forget the children of the community who extended a helping hand: Amitai Marmor, Yair Polinsky, Amit Kloperstock, and also those I did not mention. All of them, honored and helped father, and for that you should all be blessed may God you repay you what you deserve.

All your years you dedicated time to study the Torah, Mishnah, and Gemara. And all the books of faith that are in our home, you read with an unquenchable thirst. We tried to supply you with many more books to satisfy your thirst. Two years ago your vision became weak and you couldn't read by yourself. The last months Yehuda Dreyfus, may he be designated for a long life, kept you company and together you got back to studying Mishnah.

The last week before the festival of Shavuot, it was suggested that he set aside the normal order of study and switch to the tractate Bikkurim (first fruits). On the last Shabbat evening, you still participated in prayer in shul, you were singing songs of Shabbat at the dining table and that is how you ended your life.

In the last six weeks, you were cut off from this world's foolishness, and on Shabbat near afternoon prayers, you went up to Paradise.

Father, with all our strength we tried, Beni and I, to be a support to you all the years especially the last nine you were with us.

This is the place to thank my dear husband who always gave his time and his strength to help my father, days and nights.

But, I am sure that maybe sometime by mistake or error in some place, that we left you sometimes at home when we went out for an event, a talk or work, and for this we request forgiveness and pardon from you, if we unwillingly hurt you.

May your soul be bound in the afterlife.

[original page 115]

The narrative poem below tells the struggle of my mother's life. I wrote it for sheloshim (the 30th day after her passing). Every year I read it on the anniversary (yahrzeit) of her death. I tried then to summarize the years of mother's life, which were in essence one long struggle to survive:

A struggle that started in her childhood in the bitter Diaspora and to survive from war to war until she came to the Land.

In this "narrative poem" about my mother, I tried to recount all the struggles, suffering and life's difficulties that she suffered in her childhood and youth.

Struggles without end and the will to survive, to study, and to develop, to change the present conditions, to renew, to build and to discover, to dream and to aspire.

As is written in the verse: Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails. (Proverbs 19:21)

In Yiddish this sounds much better, "Der Mensch Tracht on Gut Lacht": "A man thinks and God laughs." A person thinks and God laughs. There were still many difficult days ahead for you (after your youth).

All the parts of your life of my mother, I know from her stories.

My mother used to sit and tell us [about her life] and I used to drink in her stories and internalize them deep in my heart. It is too bad that I didn't set them down in writing when she was still alive, because then I could have asked more and taken a greater interest.

The Struggle

Struggle is the symbol of your life,

A girl merely three years old (hayyit)

A childhood you longed for (ratsit).

Food, hugging and love (ahavah)

But there was no choice (berera).

On the road went the family (mishpacha),

To wander and to find hiding (mehsa).

From Volyn which is conquered (kevusha)

to Russia, much larger (gedola).

There is no bread nor home (bayit),

[original page 116]

No pampering and little love (ahava)

For the struggle she is ready (muchana).

Days passed, and months without count (siporim)

For a home there is longing (rotsim).

A home is destroyed (charev)

The heart aches (doe-av),

But hope is in the heart (lev)

There is no despair.

Life you have to renew

A house is built (bonim)

Business is done (oskim).

Apparently,

To its orbit, life returns (chozrim)

But not for long (rabim)

Your father [Anshel] was torn away at a young age (yamav)

An orphan remained

With six siblings.

No more childhood (yaldut)

Enough mischievous behavior (shovivut)

Time to brace yourself (“gird your loins”) (motnayim)

To help with work in the house (habayit).

Small though you are (hinech),

Go tend the geeze, why don't you? (mah bechach)

In cold and heat,

Pain and suffering (tsa-ar)

You tears fell on the pillow (car)

But what of the crying,
What of the tears (dimaot),
A student you wanted to be (lihiyot)

[original page 117]

There is a need to study
There is nothing [else] to be done (laasot),
And therefore with courage without fear
For school you signed up (neirshamt)
Reading and writing, math, and language (safah)
You opened a window to a bit of knowledge (haskalah)
And that way alone alone,
You labored during the day and night (belail)
With no laziness (hitatsail)
In Yiddish the maxim says
“work little girl so you a dress”
This proverb you repeated many times
if not, you would have gone barefoot.

Into a beautiful young woman, you grew (begart)
And in the Zionist youth movement, “Betar”, you chose (behart).
Activities, speeches and ceremonies (techasim)
Speeches of Jabotinsky you never missed (mafsidim).
Marching groups of young girls and boys,
To the big cities of Rovno, Dubno
To devour and listen and fill up your reserves for the coming days
(habaim)
To read and read and to widen the horizons (ofkim).
To renew, to improve, to make efficient and beautify,
A room full of plants for beauty (tiferet),
You take care of (mtapelet).

In the long evenings you weave plans (toferret)
To the Land of Israel to fulfill your wish
A radio is acquired (rochshim)
And the house becomes a meeting place for friends (haverim)
Putting on plays, debates being lead (menahalim),
The house bubbles up with life (chaim).

[original page 118]

Between making kneading and cooking, and going on outings,
You were meeting people and making friends.
And again struggles at the door.
And what about [accepting] the match making? (shiduchim)
And what about all the new things?
Hebrew, Zionism and camping (mahnaot),
Debates without getting tired (laot),
But a girl like you
Will not be told what to do (laasot).
A friendship in secret you continued (himshact)
And to match making, "Enough," you said (amarah)
Between kneading and cooking (bishul),
You also went on an outing (tiyul).
In the Zionist movement you are active (poelet)
But to no purpose
You got slapped
What is this foolishness (evelet)?
Going to the land? To be licentious (mefkeret)?
Grandfather Eliezer to you would say (omer):
Of course, you passed tests (avart),
a certificate you received (kibalt)
But why would you go (lalechet)
to a strange land, to the homeland (moledet)?
Here is your home, here is your family.

A sister-you have one (achat)
And you have to extend her a hand (yad)
Your sister gave birth (yoledet)
And for her you have to be a help (ozeret)
Your hands are full of work all kinds (ach)
But your soul is occupied with plans of your own (shelach)
You do not rebel (moredet)
Just that life you see differently (aheret)

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News in the mornings (bokarim),
The skies are darkening
The struggle of life again returns (yotzim).
17th Tammuz
10 young men were shot (yorim),
The first to fall to sanctify God's name
And among the fallen (nophlim)
Who, if not, the love of your youth (neorim)
Crying and bitterness is your lot (helkecha).
No comforter, the heart is in anguish (doev)
A day is coming that is neither day nor night
Eighteen months between despair and life (chaim),
You came forth from the pain (hayesorim)
The struggle of life, you won (gevalt),
From the inferno, you escaped (noteret),
From where comes your strength, daughter?
Be strong,
More days are coming of struggle are coming

Life she got as a gift,
But her vow she did not forget (shachecha)

The vow she made (nidra)

“If I survive with my life, a daughter of Israel I will set free (eshachrare)”

And thus with courage and no fear (chet)

To a remote village you were drawn

And Aviva you set free (meshachrer).

Step by step with wisdom and patience that is great (rabah)

To the bosom of Judaism you returned her (otah)

And then the staff of wandering you took (nitalt)

And together with the new family

in the Land, you arrived (higat).