

Living History

Volume III

Club Nissim
The Boro Park Y
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Edited by Simonne Kirschhorn



Claims Conference

ועידת התביעות

The Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany

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FOREWORD

To the contributors and the readers of the Living History Volume III:

When you open this precious book and read of the lives of the members of Club Nissim, you can only be astounded by the Yiras Shomayim of the individuals who survived the Nazi Holocaust. They have survived and continue to live positive and fruitful lives – a true "Nes" – a Miracle.

By reading these memories, sharing in the lives and memories and pictures of these contributors, we are enabled to get a glimpse of the strength of character and belief that kept them alive during the Shoah. It is up to us to learn from the members of Club Nissim how to live our lives and how to raise our own families. Sharing with us their histories strengthens us as individuals and as a group, as Bnai Torah and as mothers and daughters.

I thank the contributors for their openness in sharing with us their life histories and for being the true Mothers of Israel.

I dedicate this book to the memory of all those who perished during the war, for whom there is no grave for us to mark and honor; and to those who survived the war and who do not let us forget.

I thank the Board of Directors of the Boro Park Y, the UJA/Federation of New York and the Claims Conference who have supported Club Nissim financially, spiritually and morally.

Ellie Kastel

Executive Director, Boro Park Y

INTRODUCTION

It is our deeply felt privilege to be able to present a third volume of Living History – memoirs by Holocaust Survivors. When the first volume was printed, in 2007, we never believed that the project eventually would grow to this extent. And yet, it must be said, we are still hoping that more of our Survivors will want to write down their stories for posterity, for they all have stories to tell that are paradoxically, both heart wrenching and, by dint of their *emunah* and *bitachon*, very uplifting.

The memoirs contained herein were written with “blood, sweat and tears” – yet, after reading them, you put the book down buoyed by its pervasive message of courage, faith and *simchas hachayim*, enjoyment of life. Life has not been easily come by for our Survivors, and therefore it is all the more cherished. Most striking of all is the faith that shines forth from these pages, from these narrators – their shared, unshakeable conviction that Hashem runs the world, and that, ultimately, everything will be for the good. In this, our writers are remarkable role models and a true inspiration to us all.

May this book, as its predecessors, be for a blessing to the memory of the *Kedoshim*, on whose shoulders our generation is standing.

Simonne Hirschhorn

Program Director, Club Nissim

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BRONIA BRANDMAN



Bronia (Bracha) Brandman, née Rubin, was born in 1931 in Jaworzno, Poland.

She came to the U.S. in 1946, achieved a Master's Degree in education, and worked for many years in the Public School system. These days, she volunteers as a docent and public speaker at the Jewish Heritage Museum—A Living Memorial to the Holocaust.

Mrs. Brandman has one child and two grandchildren. She lives with her husband in Boro Park.

BRONIA BRANDMAN

A Family Portrait

We lived in Jaworzno, a small town in Poland, located 20 kilometers from Auschwitz. We were a family of eight, middle class, Orthodox. My maternal grandfather, Elias Mandelbaum, the patriarch of the family, was wealthy, a City Councilor, known for his charitable deeds and very much respected. He had twelve children and because of his wealth and reputation he was able to attract renowned *talmidei chachomim* as spouses for his children. He owned a string of houses, all connected, facing the middle of the market square. The market square was fun to live in. All important events took place there. Upon his death his children inherited the houses. My aunts and uncles all had large families. The houses were built around a huge backyard. There were glass-enclosed verandas; warehouses for grandfather's wares of wines, whiskeys and liqueurs; a built in Sukkah in the attic; a special Passover apartment; and lots of open space for the children to play in. We had our own synagogue on the premises and our own *shochet*, ritual slaughterer. Facing the market square were our hardware store, my aunts' textile store, a liquor store, furniture store, ceramic tile store, haberdashery and, best of all, an ice cream store. The backyard with its three gates was the town's landmark. It had a name – it was called the "Burgh." It was a child's haven. There were always children around of all ages, playing boisterously. Alas for the adults, it was hard to get a peaceful Shabbos afternoon



The author's childhood home

nap. The privy was an ordeal, especially in winter. It was outdoors, accessed through the veranda.

We attended compulsory public school in the morning and religious school in the afternoon. Public school was fraught with apprehension, as the teachers and students were anti-Semitic and abusive toward us. It was

exciting when itinerant teachers came through our town. The supplementary lessons we received were varied, i.e. dancing, social graces, languages, (Hebrew, German, English), and literature. I loved to go to the local Sokol* for calisthenics, at which I excelled. Winters were fun, sledding and ice skating down steep hills. Summers were spent in the country. We children were always exhorted to remember our exalted heritage and act accordingly. Though plagued by anti-Semitism, life in our town was pleasant. We were enveloped by the warmth of our extended family and sustained by our faith.

My main goal in life was to be like my eight years older, sophisticated sister, Mila. In my eyes



Brothers Mendek (left) and Tulek

she was the most beautiful, charming and wise person in the world. She was a romantic, a dreamer, and read voraciously. She was my idol – I was her shadow. When she went to the movies, I trailed behind her. I followed her wherever she went with her friends. When one summer, the teenage cousins were offered the choice of going to a sleep-away camp, or rent a cottage in the woods with a young aunt as chaperone, they opted for renting the cottage. I was the only child there. I had an unfor-

gettable time, spending twenty-four hours a day with my adored sister. Mila was taken to the gas chamber in Auschwitz in 1943, when she succumbed to typhus. She was twenty years old.

My bane was my older brother, Tulek, who was very tough. He beat me up; he expropriated my daily allowance; he threatened to break my toys. He cut school and *cheder*. He was chief among his friends. There was a perpetual twinkle in his eyes. He always had us guessing what mischief he was up to next. Tulek marched to his own drumbeat. I thought he had the most personality of us all. Tulek was murdered in Auschwitz at the age of fourteen.

The oldest brother, Mendek, was shy, unassuming and undemanding. He took after my father in being handy and inventive. He was forced to work in the coal mines when WWII started. We did not know his true mettle until some time into the war, when he volunteered to go to a slave labor camp in place of Mila. He miraculously survived nine concentration camps. Today he is a very successful business man, who invented a number of commercial machines for which he has patents. Mendek writes poetry and paints. His theme is brotherly love.

Rutka, unlike me, used to go to sleep right after supper and wake up with the roosters. We slept in one bed. She was a charming child. Rutka was very playful, easy-going and daring. How she zoomed fearlessly down a steep street on ice skates, laughing all the way down! At the age of ten, Rutka was selected by Dr. Mengele to go to the gas chamber.



Baby sister Macia

Macia, my baby sister, was father's favorite. He thought she was the prettiest and smartest of all of his children. She never cried or pined for our parents and never complained when she was starving after our parents were deported. Macia was consigned by Dr. Mengele to the gas chamber in Auschwitz in 1943, when she was six years old.

My father, Rabbi Israel Rubin, was a distinguished-looking gentleman. He was erudite in both Talmud and secular education. His genealogy went back to the 16th Century, to Rabbi Isserles, known as the Rema. In our family, father was on a pedestal and approached with deference. He was also exceptionally handy, and created a telephone from parts and connected it from our home to our hardware store. My mother, Ida Mandelbaum-Rubin, was one of twelve siblings of a rich family. Mother was warm, nurturing, pious, charitable, wise, and non-judgmental. She was called the "*advokat*," by her siblings, the judicious advocate of the family. She loved dancing, and prided herself on being able to recite poetry in German by Schiller and Goethe. Mother and father were murdered on arrival in Auschwitz, in August, 1942. She was forty-two years old; he was forty-four.



The author's father, Rabbi Israel Rubin...



... and mother, Ida Mandelbaum-Rubin

Of my mother's eleven siblings and their spouses, not one survived. Of those who had young children, not one survived. Only two children of my entire town survived. I am one of them.

Two Pears

On the heels of deportation of Jews from our home town, Jaworzno, when our parents and my brother Tulek were dispatched to Auschwitz to be murdered, my older sister, Mila, my two younger sisters, Rutka, Macia, and I fled for our lives from Jaworzno to Sosnowiec.

Mila sold her cherished gold locket. She had clandestinely kept that locket, hidden under her dress, though it meant her death if it were

discovered. With the money of the sale of her precious locket, she bought two pears.

How we eyed them, green and plump and whole, begging to be bitten into, juice flowing from tender pulp. They'd settle in the stomach and remain savored. They were palpable with substance. I remember them so vividly. Why in the world would I remember those two pears amid my horrors in the Holocaust?

Mila took a sharp knife. Three pairs of eyes intently watched her every move. Would she succeed in cutting them exactly in the middle? Yes, she did. Would she again be able to cut the halves into quarters? Not exactly. She snipped off a sliver from one quarter and added it to the smaller one. Job accomplished. Then, we slowly savored our portion. Did some of us eat it faster than others, probably? I don't know who of us four sisters suggested it, but it was agreed to divide a quarter from the next pear and share it. The 3/4 pear that remained was placed on top of a tall cabinet to be eaten the next day. The pear lay towards the left side edge, about 5" from the corner. I was suspicious. One of my sisters might not be able to resist it and might just help herself to a bit.



The author at the age of 8, with older sister Mila and younger sister Rutka

That fateful night I tossed and turned in bed. I could not stop dwelling on the pear. My stomach growled. My mouth salivated. Were my sisters sleeping? Were they too obsessed? I could resist no longer. Quietly, I moved the table next to the cabinet and placed a chair on top of the table. I climbed up, careful not to wake my sisters. Did they see me? Did they keep quiet in order not to embarrass me? I took the pear down and with the sharp knife cut off a tiny sliver. Surely it wouldn't be noticeably missing. I replaced the pear in exactly the same spot. I put the chair and table in their former places and went back to bed.

My hunger unappeased, I obsessed again. How long did it take me to return for another sliver? I can't tell. But return I did. Would my sisters notice that the 3/4 pear was smaller? Would they accuse me, shame me? Or, would they think that it was one of my sisters who was the perpetrator? Nothing was ever said.

I Cannot Cry

I grew up in the midst of the Holocaust. The year before WWII started, Jews of Polish ancestry were expelled from Germany, robbed of all their possessions and forced to migrate. Where to? With what means? Some came to Jaworzno, my hometown, to be ab-

sorbed by us, whether we were in a position to accommodate them or not. We shared our apartment with them, which was the moral thing to do. They knew no Polish and were totally forlorn. The safety net for me, a seven year-old, was beginning to grow holes.

Adults mulled over, analyzed the news from Germany. Impending war. Whispering – the children should not hear the foreboding news, should not be frightened. After much deliberation, my parents decided to flee to avoid being in the front line, Jaworzno was close to the German border. But where to go with six children, ranging from a baby to a teenager? Was the house and store to be left unprotected? The decision was made: Father and Mendek, my older brother, were to stay. Mother and the rest of the children were to go to Mielec, my uncle's town, inland.

There were lots of hardships along the way. In Cracow, mid-point to Mielec, the trains stopped running; or they would stop and pick up soldiers only. The platform was glutted with stranded, desperate people. I don't know how, but Mother managed to engage a horse-drawn wagon. The ride in the middle of the night was eerie. We rode along pitch black, bumpy, deserted country roads. The sea of lights seemed to follow us along in the distance. I did not comprehend those lights, but I did not dare to interrupt our self-imposed silence. It was cold. My back ached from the wooden, rattling wagon. No use complaining. Mother was powerless to help. In Mielec my uncle absorbed six people into his household, also without complaint.

The German invasion, the "Blitzkrieg," came roaring. Despite their desire for speed in conquest, the army took their time to murder Jews. In the middle of the night we heard kicking of doors with jackboots, and vicious yelling, "Damned Jews, swine, dogs, get out." They selected the men, marched them to the synagogue and bolted the doors. They poured kerosene around the synagogue and burned the men alive. They butchered Jews in the slaughter house and drowned Jews in the Mikvah. Could a mother convince her children, that though this was a horrendous tragedy, it was of a passing nature? No mother could. The Germans showed us a token of what was in store for us Jews.

When public transportation resumed, we returned to our home, and to our father's tale of woe. German soldiers had forced him into a sub-basement of our store, ordered him to raise his hands and face the wall. They were going to shoot him, as my brother watched. After considerable horseplay and laughter, they let him go. It was for sport. Father never crossed the threshold of the store again.

Daily life was fraught with deprivation, as decree after decree excised our rights. Our belongings were confiscated bit by bit, including our hardware store. We were starving. To earn money for minimum subsistence, I smuggled textiles, squirreled away before my aunt's store was taken over. I exchanged it for flour and sugar on the forbidden Christian side, to be sold on the black market in the Jewish quarter. If caught, I would be shot, or imprisoned and tortured to reveal my contacts. How would I have behaved? Would I have incriminated others? Alone in this ordeal, how was a nine year-old to act?

We lived in consuming fear. Surprise raids were constant. At first the raids were for hard labor (unremunerated). Mendek was forced to work in the Jaworzno coal mines. Then the raids gathered slaves for labor camps. In 1941 Father was ordered to deliver his oldest child to be deported. Heroic Mendek volunteered to go in place of Mila, who was the oldest. He felt that Mila was of help to our ailing mother. This was as yet our greatest tragedy: a boy of sixteen, alone, in Germany, subject to torture, starvation and hard labor. There was pacing, hand-wringing, consternation. We were sure Mendek would not survive. How did Mila feel? Who can foretell des-

tiny! Mendek and I are the only (unlikely) survivors from our family of eight.

Our worst fears came to pass. My parents and my brother Tulek were railed to Auschwitz in the summer of 1942. No one ever came back from Auschwitz to tell of its horrors. I knew that I would never see them again. Did I cry? No. I did not cry. I was a fugitive then, trying to escape from the clutches of the Germans, going into the unknown, with three of my sisters, one older and two younger, with only the clothes on our backs.

We were hiding from constant raids in the town and later the ghetto of Sosnowiec, where we ran to. Because Jaworzno was declared "Judenrein," cleansed of Jews, we belonged with the dead of Jaworzno and had no right to existence and were not entitled to any life-sustaining provisions. Later we found out that due to some quirk in the law, my two younger sisters and I, because we were under twelve years of age (I was eleven), were allowed rations and a room. As the oldest, I became the head of the household, and responsible to the authorities.

In 1943 Sosnowiec was declared "Judenrein." All Jews were herded into cattle cars and dispatched to Auschwitz. There Dr. Mengele, with a flick of his white-gloved index finger, pointed my two baby sisters and me to the gas chamber line. In a knee-jerk reaction, I escaped from that line and joined Mila's line; she was selected to go in the opposite direction. While I was standing naked, being shaved and tattooed in the concentration camp of Auschwitz, my two baby sisters, Rutka and Macia were being gassed. Did I cry? No. I did not cry. I was beyond crying. All my energy was funneled into surviving to the next hour in that hellhole that was Auschwitz. Mila came down with typhus and was no longer considered a productive being. She was consigned to the gas chamber. Did I cry? No. I did not cry. I retreated into life-long guilt and re-crimination for having survived.

Freedom came in May 1945. Time to reflect and take stock. Did I cry? No. I did not cry. At fourteen, I felt all alone in the world. How was I going to live life in view of what happened to my family? Eventually I settled into normal life... suppressing it all. Or did I? Still, I cannot cry.

LEAH CHARNY



Leah Charny, née Mincberg, was born before the War in Ostrow Mazowietzk, Poland.

She came to the U.S. in 1952, and worked for a few years for a glamorous jewelry firm on 5th Avenue.

The daughter of the Mashgiach of the Lubliner Yeshivah, Mrs. Charny has three children, and — *bli ayin hora* — “many” grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

She lives with her husband in Boro Park.

LEAH CHARNY

My Heroic Husband

My husband, Shimon Charny, is reluctant to speak about the unspeakable horrors he endured during the Holocaust. He is not one to boast about his heroism or bravery and it was only after much prodding that the following story emerged.

A remarkable act of kindness requires a courageous spirit, and in Lodz Litzmanstadt Ghetto it constituted a flirtation with death. My husband Shimon was a slight young boy of thirteen when he entered the Ghetto with his parents, four brothers, and one sister. The disruption of normal life was total, but the appalling conditions around him didn't succeed in altering little Shimon's spirit. Shimon acted as the messenger who received food from a compassionate gentile and carried it to an old man on a regular basis.

One day Shimon was caught in action and beaten mercilessly by three Gestapo men, who wanted him to reveal the name of the person who "illegally" supplied the life-sustaining food for the old man. Other men were also collected and beaten for a variety of dubious infractions; they received one hundred lashes but little Shimon who remained upright and mute was given one hundred and twenty-five! The three Gestapo men were utterly perplexed by the incorrigible obstinacy of this boy who wouldn't reveal the name of the food supplier. They aimed their rifles towards Shimon in one last desperate attempt to force him to produce the one name whose utterance would award the boy the possibility to live. It was so easy to say the name. There were so many reasons to give it. Even if he did reveal the name, the Gestapo might not find their prey anyway. Who would blame this frail, tortured boy for succumbing to a moment of weakness in order to save his own life?

But Shimon remained strong and unflinching, to the momentous click that meant the rifle would soon go off. He stood with his eyes closed wrapping himself in the comforting wings of prayer. He quietly whispered Shema Yisroel and the Vidui, the same prayers uttered by many a Jew in his last moments, sacrificing his life in order to preserve the sanctity of his soul.

This courageous little boy conquered with his silence the might of the nefarious German army. Shimon had willingly forfeited his life so as not to snitch on another person. It was unthinkable in any case to repay the man who had given him the food with anything but gratitude. He would cause him no harm, intentional or otherwise, even if it meant sacrificing his life.

Shimon did not die. He remained standing with his eyes closed, immersed in his final prayers long after the Gestapo put down their guns and withdrew in defeat. Only when someone came and told him to go back to his bunk, did he realize he was given back his life. Shimon suffered for weeks afterwards from the brutal beating that he had received, and there was not a spot on his body that was not bruised and swollen. His soul, however, remained unscathed.

Shimon never thought he did anything remarkable, and it took him ten years of married life before he even mentioned this story to me. If you see him today, you can detect no hint of the profound heroism that lies camouflaged beneath the guise of a gentle unassuming grandfather. We are blessed with children and grandchildren who carry with them the same veracious spirit of loyalty to their *mesorah* and profound kindness to anyone in need.

BREINDY EINHORN



Breindy (Berta) Einhorn, née Klein, was born in 1931 in Sighet, Romania.

She came to the U.S. in 1956, after spending several years recuperating in Sweden, having been brought there by the Red Cross after the Liberation.

Mrs. Einhorn has three children, twelve grandchildren and six great-grandchildren to keep her busy!

She lives in Boro Park.

BREINDY EINHORN

How I Conquered the *Yetzer Hara*

Sadly, I lost my second husband last year, after being together for twenty-five years. I was very heartbroken and depressed; it is very hard to describe the feeling, only one who went through such a loss can understand it.

Before each Yom Tov it feels especially hard. This Purim I decided not to prepare any kind of *mishloach manos*, just to ignore the holiday and run away from it. My daughter who lives nearby invited me to stay at her house, but in the end I decided not to give in to the destructive *yetzer hara* that wanted to draw me away from the celebration of Purim; instead I chose to continue and go on with my life.

I found a white hat in my basement and decorated it with flowers and decided to wear it on Purim and stay home and prepare *mishloach manos* for my children, grandchildren, and neighbors. I can truly tell you that my family enjoyed seeing me in a good mood and that I was able to conquer the *yetzer hara*.

I wanted to share my true story with people who can't get rid of their depression and loss, as the saying goes, that *tzaras acheirim, chatzi nechama*—shared troubles are half a consolation.

So go on with your life, and count your blessings, instead of feeling sorry for yourself. May Hashem give us all strength to be able to go on with our lives *b'simcha*. It will make me feel good if even one person will benefit from my experience.

LILLIAN FEINTUCH



Lillian (Chana Lea) Feintuch, née Rosenfeld, was born in 1938 in Balmazújváros, Hungary. She came to the U.S. in 1949. In addition to raising her family, she managed one of the family stores for many years, and found time to tutor dyslexic children.

Mrs. Feintuch has three children, eight grandchildren, and , so far, one great-grandchild. She lives with her husband in Boro Park.

LILLIAN FEINTUCH

Miracle on the Train

In 1939, my grandmother took care of all the necessary papers for herself and my grandfather to leave Nazi-occupied Germany, for the safe shores of America. All their children were married, except my Uncle Duvid, who was only seventeen. The Hungarians wouldn't let him leave because he was wanted by the Hungarian Army. So when my grandparents left, Uncle Duvid, who was my youngest uncle, came to live with us. My three brothers and I had lots of fun with him. He would take us on outings, and created some of my most wonderful childhood memories.

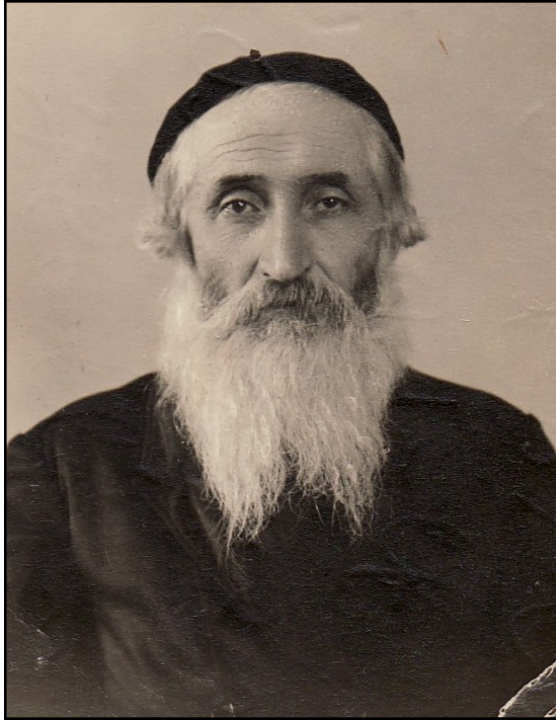
We had many good friends in Hungary. My best friend since birth was Anico Steinberg. We used to spend our days together playing, unaware of the looming tragedy. Her uncle and my father were study partners, and they would learn together early in the morning, before they went to their respective businesses. For a long time after the war, I would dream about her – especially on Friday nights. I always felt that I was supposed to go to Auschwitz instead of her. Let me explain.

When we were together in the Brick factory in Debrecen, the Nazis made an announcement that anyone with more than four children should come down to the yard with their belongings. The Nazis wanted to send all the larger families to Auschwitz. My family went down, and we were sent with a transport to Auschwitz. Luckily, while we were en route, the train tracks were bombed, and our transport was sent back to Strasshof, and then to Vienna. Unfortunately, the Nazis were constantly repairing the train tracks, and the transport that Anico and her family were on continued to Auschwitz, where they met their untimely death. We found out later that Anico was put into the crematorium as soon as she arrived in Auschwitz. Even though many years have passed, I still feel very guilty that I am alive, and she is not.

Another friend of mine was Marika Farber. She was an only child. Both of her parents were doctors, and very close friends of my parents. I remember how Marika's parents would make her a lavish birthday party every year. The last birthday party is inscribed upon my memory. This is what happened.

When I left for Marika's house, the weather was beautiful. As the hours passed however, a storm began to brew, and snow began to fall. By the time my Uncle Duvid came to pick me up, there was snow and ice everywhere. I was wearing my pretty red sandals, and there was no way I could walk on the snow like that! So Uncle Duvid scooped me up and carried me all the way home. I really liked that. Uncle Duvid always made me feel special. That was Marika's last birthday party. Soon after, she and her highly educated parents were taken to Auschwitz. They were on the same transport as Anico and her family.

When the war was over, in May 1945, my mother and three brothers and I went back to Hungary. My father had been separated from us years earlier, and we hoped we would find him in our hometown. Indeed, my father had been liberated in April, and was anxiously hoping that we would be alive. Every day, my father would go to the train station, searching the crowds of new arrivals, hoping to find a familiar face. Finally, we arrived! What a reunion! We had all suffered so much since our separation, and we had feared that we would never see our father again.



The author's maternal grandparents, Yosef and Shaindel Yitty Isaacs

Now that we were together again, we let ourselves fall into his arms, appreciating what we had dreaded to have lost.

We remained in our hometown Balmazujvaros, Hungary for ten months. My father opened a dry goods store, but due to hyperinflation he could not replenish his stock after selling his goods. To add to our worries, very few Jews returned to our town after the war, with the communist presence growing stronger every day. My father saw that there was no future for our family there, and decided that it would be best to go back to Germany and stay in a DP camp. We went to Budapest for Shabbos, and from there continued to Germany. There we planned to apply for the necessary papers to immigrate to the United States. This seemed like the best plan, as we had our grandparents, uncles, and aunts there.

We took a train early Sunday morning and began a very prolonged journey to Germany. The trains were very inconsistent, and made many stops along the way. On the train from Budapest to Germany, an amazing incident occurred. My brother, Meshulem Feish and I were standing and talking. He was leaning on the door of the train, and I was standing opposite him. As I was talking to him, I saw the train door sliding open, and my brother began falling out of the train. I was terrified! My family had miraculously survived the war years intact – and now, after the danger was over, we'd lose my brother?! I was numb and I didn't know what to do. It must have been an angel who pushed me to grab my brother's hands. With a strength I did not even know I had, I managed to pull him back into the train, saving his life. There was a big commotion and everyone was looking at me. My parents were so happy, and so proud of me! It was a miracle that we weren't both sucked out of the train. To this day, I don't know where I got the strength and the instinctive reaction to grab his hands. I know that it was Hashem pulling the strings, and I am fortunate to have been the conduit for His *chesed*.

We were so happy to be alive and together! My brother Meshulam Feish made every day of his newly-granted life worthwhile. He went to yeshiva in New York under the Klausenberger Rebbe, and was a wonderful *talmid chochom* and an asset to society. I am grateful to have been the *shaliach* that saved my great brother.

My parents were very kind people. I often meet people who still remember them and their kindness; they remind me about the good deeds they did for the community, especially after the war. Even in those uncertain times, my parents, Shimon and Bracha Rivka Rosenfeld, found the means to help others. They unofficially adopted four teenage girls that had no one left in the world. My parents took them into our home and guided them, and even helped marry them off. They tried to provide them with the warmth and love they needed to heal their traumatized souls and bodies.

One of these girls was Shaindy Eidelsten. After she had been living with us for a while, a man knocked on our barrack door in the DP camp, asking if we knew a girl by the name of Shaindy Edelstein. "Someone told me you might know where she is." My father told him that in fact she lived with us, but she was out right now, and would be back later. "Is there anything I could help you with?" my father asked, in his usual helpful manner. "No, I'm just looking for Shaindy" he replied. Trying to engage the stranger in conversation, my father explained how sad Shaindy's situation was. "*Nebach*, she has no family left at all. Hitler, *yemach shemo*, wiped out her whole family." The man's body began to tremble, and his eyes filled with tears. "I am her father" he said simply. A short while later, father and daughter immigrated to Israel to start their new life – together.

My cousin, Jutka Isaacs, had lost both her parents just weeks before the liberation, and was living in Budapest with an aunt. Jutka's father, Chaim Hersch, was my mother's brother. My parents wanted Jutka to come with us; they felt that America could offer her a fresh start, and she would become a part of our family, but her aunt refused. Her aunt said that a mother's side of the family is closer than her father's side. She could not be persuaded. For years, my parents and our other relatives would send packages to Jutka's aunt to make things easier for her. Much later we found out that her aunt had sent her away to an orphanage in the outskirts of Budapest, and she had never benefited from the packages.

But Hashem was there for Jutka and sent an angel in the form of Mrs. Lieberman to look out for her. Mrs. Lieberman lived near the orphanage, met my cousin, and fell in love with her. She took her into her home and treated her like a daughter. Mrs. Lieberman had two sons of her own, but no daughters. Jutka took on the role of the only daughter, and basked in



Cousin Jutka as a young child

the warmth and love of the Lieberman family. In 1956, they all immigrated to Canada, and settled there. When they became of age, Andrew, Mrs. Lieberman's older son, and Jutka married! Now Jutka was truly part of the Lieberman family. I often think of her, and I'm happy that things worked out so well for her.

When we first arrived in America, we settled with my mother's parents in Bridgeport, Connecticut. My grandparents, Yosef and Shaindel Yitty Isaacs, were devout Jews who sacrificed a lot to keep the Torah and its *mitzvos*. My grandfather was a *chazzan* and a *shochet*. He only ate meat and chicken that he himself slaughtered. Once his vision was compromised and he could no longer slaughter, he stopped eating meat and chicken altogether.

After we moved to New York, to be closer to other *frum* Jews, we did not see my grandparents very often. Yet, their legacy and the legacy of my parents continue to live on in my life, and the life of my children and grandchildren. For this I am grateful.

LILLY GOLDNER



Lilly (Zissel) Goldner, née Josefovits, was born in 1926 in Ujfeherto, Hungary.

She immigrated to the U.S. in 1952. She is an avid gardener and takes great pleasure in the flowers she grows in her yard.

Mrs. Goldner has given birth to six children, and has — *keynahora* — "many" grandchildren and great-grandchildren!

She lives in Boro Park.

LILLY GOLDNER

A Piece of Gehinnom

I am from a Chassidic family. We lived in a town called Ujfeherto, near Debrecen. When I was seventeen years old, the Germans took my mother, me, and eleven siblings to the ghetto. The Hungarians took my father and oldest brother to a different ghetto. They didn't want us all to be together. I never saw my father again. It was the day after Pesach and we had not baked any *chometz* yet. So we went to the ghetto without any food.

A few weeks later, we were deported from the ghetto. We arrived in Auschwitz three days before Shavuot. I was assigned to Lager C, Block 10. I was there throughout the summer.

In the fall, the owner of Philips Radio Factory came to Auschwitz with a ration card allowing him to take 300 girls to work for him. Two thousand girls were lined up naked as he passed through us choosing the healthiest looking ones. I was chosen.

However, he didn't show up at the assigned time to pick us up. Since we were no longer needed by the SS in Auschwitz, they sent us to the crematorium. It was raining that day, and the crematorium was bustling with activity. We were already standing naked with only our shoes and a bar of "soap" to use when we went to the "shower". The soap was made out of the flesh of dead people. The Polish-Jewish kapos told us: "Girls, when they open the door, say *Viduy*, because this is it." We were young girls, and we didn't even know the *Viduy*.

Then, a miracle happened and the air raid siren went off. The Germans chased us back to our barracks. Still naked. That night the owner of the factory showed up, and we were allowed to take real showers. We were given some clothes, and taken to work in his factory.

Conditions there were better. They weren't good, but this man was normal, not like the SS. Before Christmas he wanted to give us socks as a present, but the SS wouldn't allow it. My job was called "montage." I positioned the small wire inside the light bulb. The factory was in Weisswasser, near Gurlitz.

When the allies were nearing Weisswasser, the Germans liquidated the factory and sent us to Horneburg, and later to Bergen-Belsen. They did not want the allies to find us. It took us six days to get to Bergen-Belsen. We walked part of the way, and went on cattle cars for the other part of the journey.

When we arrived in Bergen-Belsen, we thought we would be given a little something to eat after our long journey. But when we got there, the inmates asked us if we had any food for them!

Bergen-Belsen was a horrible sight. The crematorium was not in use anymore. Dead bodies were collected every morning and dragged to a mountain made of rotten corpses, the so-called Todtes Berg—Mount of the Dead. They tied a rope to the hands and legs of the body and dragged it along the ground. Pieces of flesh would break off as it scraped against rocks and twigs.

One day I went on a walk with my friend to try and find some grass that was edible. In the dis-

tance we saw a little area surrounded by bricks. We thought maybe there was food inside. When we got there, we realized that it was a pile of dead babies.

On April 15th, Bergen-Belsen was liberated by the British Army. The SS had already tied white armbands to their jacket sleeves in surrender. They had given their ammunition to the Hungarian soldiers but when they saw us Jews happy and “celebrating” the arrival of the Allies, they grabbed their guns back from the Hungarians and shot into the crowd.

The English brought food. They gave out cans of baked beans. The starved stomachs couldn’t handle it and many fell ill. Twenty thousand girls died after the liberation, from stomach typhus and head typhus.

I was fortunate to have a Lager-Shvester – Rebbetzin Israel. She warned me not to eat the rich food the English had brought. I was so weak that Rebbetzin Israel would cook up potatoes and spoon-feed me the water she had used for the potatoes. I couldn’t even eat a potato.

I had no family left. About a year after the liberation I received a letter that two of my brothers had survived. We were at a wedding in Bergen-Belsen, when someone arrived with a letter from my brother. He had sent it in July, but because the country was in such disarray, I only got it in December. Out of my entire extended family of two hundred, only seven had survived.

I got married within the year. This was the greatest wonder of all, that people who were so weak managed to become healthy again, bear children, raise families, and see grandchildren!



The author as a young woman. This photo was taken for her false, non-Jewish identity papers

JUDITH GOTTDIENER



Babette Judith (Beila Chaya) Gottdiener, née Weinberger, was born in 1932 in Vienna, Austria.

She attended High School in England after the War, and came to the U.S. in 1958. Here she worked as a bookkeeper for many years. She also kept busy visiting the homebound.

Mrs. Gottdiener has two sons, and—*keynakhora*—"several" grandchildren and great-grandchildren!

She lives in Boro Park.

JUDITH GOTTDIENER

Reunited – Against All Odds

I was born in Vienna. I was my parents' first child, and the oldest – and for a while the only – grandchild. When I was about two-and-a-half or three years old, we moved from Baden near Vienna to Krakow, Poland. My mother, *a''h*, was an only child so my father, *a''h*, supervised the factories that her parents owned. That's where the World War overtook us – in Poland, together with my maternal grandparents who for many years shared an apartment with us. However, when my brother was born in 1937, they took a separate apartment a few blocks away.

Our pleasant lives changed abruptly on September 1939. My parents and grandparents were well connected, so that up until 1943 we were sometimes able to live with gentiles outside the ghetto; sometimes we were in the ghetto, since the gentile families were afraid to hide us. In September of 1943, my parents succeeded in smuggling themselves, me and both my brothers (who now live in Israel, by the way), through Czechoslovakia to Budapest in Hungary. In Czechoslovakia there were a few selfless families who helped refugees on the run to stay hidden for a few days, until further arrangements could be made to cross into Hungary. My father had his family in Hungary, and that of course helped us. My maternal grandparents did not want to join us because they were afraid that, since they were elderly, they would only jeopardize our flight out of Poland.

In Budapest we had a few semi-peaceful months until the Germans moved in and occupied Hungary on March 19, 1944. Since my parents had experienced the German occupation and knew what was awaiting us, they immediately started looking for gentile families who would hide my brothers, although all of them had a language problem. My older brother did not speak Hungarian well. The younger one was only twenty months old and did not speak yet, so placing him somewhere was much easier. Besides, due to the dangerous situation, he had not been circumcised yet, so he could easily pass as a gentile child. My parents had obtained documents as Polish gentiles for themselves and for me; no-one wanted to hide me because I looked Jewish and could not speak Hungarian. I really was very happy to stay with my parents and not be given away.

At the end of June 1944, we were all caught by the Gestapo and interned. My parents and many other families were transported to Auschwitz as political criminals. I, being only twelve years old, was released and given over to the Jewish *kehilla*, who wanted to send me to a Jewish orphanage. The Kehilla had to give some sort of guarantee that I would always be available for questioning by the Gestapo. I did not stay for more than a few hours in the orphanage, but instead placed myself with a Jewish family who knew my parents. In those days Budapest still had no ghetto. Instead, Jewish houses were marked with a yellow star on the door.

My father and forty-seven other men jumped out of the train on the way to Auschwitz as they passed through the Czechoslovakian Republic. He reached Rabbi Weissmandel, who was very active in saving Jews there. After my father recuperated (he had broken his left hand and was badly bruised), he tried to return to Budapest since he knew we were there alone and sort of penniless. He arrived back in Budapest with great *nissim*, in the middle of October 1944, just when they were deporting all the Jews in Czechoslovakia.

Shortly thereafter, the situation in Budapest became much more difficult for the remaining Jewish population, since Szalosi took over. He made a ghetto right away, and things went from bad to worse. He was out to make Budapest "Judenrein," and instituted marches, etc. When my father realized what was happening, he looked for a room for himself by gentiles, in a gentile part of town. He also transferred me from the family where I was staying to the Swiss Consulate offices, where some people were allowed to hide. You had to have very good connections in order to accomplish that! I was the youngest amongst a dozen or so adults. We all lived and slept in one room. By day we had to be very quiet, so as not to attract attention and disturb the people who worked in the offices below.

I was hidden there for a number of weeks, until Budapest was liberated in late January of 1945. My father would come to visit me from time to time, but very seldom because it was dangerous for him to be in the street. He would never tell me where he lived. I did not know his address because people were afraid that, being so young, I would divulge it if I were to be caught and beaten. After I was liberated the fights continued, street by street, and house by house. Finally it was over and the Russians liberated our part of town.

I waited for two days for my father to show up and claim me, but nobody came. You cannot imagine how petrified I was, because we were told



The author as a young bride in 1954, together with her father

that all of Pest was liberated by now, so I wanted to go and look for him. Against many people's advice, I dressed with a kerchief on my head and left to seek out my father, not knowing where he lived – but I went, and Hashem must have guided me, since that was an unknown part of town for me. I walked and walked; I saw many dead people, horses, and bombed-out houses, but I walked until I came to an apartment house and from far away I saw half of it was bombed down. I did not know what to do next, but I went into the courtyard and started asking people if Mr. Frankowsky (which was my father's name according to his false gentile papers) lived in the building. They showed me the door where he was staying with a gentile family who was also bombed out. When he saw me he could not believe his eyes; he did not know that my part of town was already liberated. He himself had been liberated ten days prior to that, and he could not believe that I had found him. Neither could I!

It is more than sixty-four years since it happened, and many times when I think about my experience – how I found my father in an unknown part of

Budapest – I marvel at all the *nissim* that Hashem performed for our family. My mother returned from Auschwitz, and my brothers survived unharmed with their gentile families, and we were all reunited in July 1945. We were the very lucky ones, *boruch Hashem!* Like everybody else of that generation, I lost grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins and many members of my extended family on both my father's and mother's side.

Throughout those long and lonely, difficult years and even after the War, until I settled in the U.S. with my parents, my brothers, my husband and son, I could clearly see how many times Hashem's protective hands were above me, and my family, my in-laws – and how He guided us all.

RIVKA GREENFELD



Rivka Greenfeld, née Braun, was born in 1934 in Hajdu-Szoboszlo, in Hungary.

She came to the U.S. in 1948, and attended Rebbetzin Kaplan's Beth Jacob High School. Her pastimes include visiting the homebound, reading, swimming, and enjoying classical music.

Mrs. Greenfeld has four children, and — *keynakhora* — "many" grandchildren and great-grandchildren!

She lives in Boro Park.

RIVKA GREENFELD

Memories of a Lost World

Once upon a time long, long ago, in a different world, in a different era, in a different century, far removed from today's modern technology, my family – my parents, two sisters and two brothers – lived in a fairly small town in Hungary. We were 120 Jewish families among a population of 32,000 gentiles. Unlike many other towns that only had one central school system, where both the gentiles and Jewish children had to learn together, our town had its own Jewish school. The major asset of our school was its teacher, Lowy Bacsí, who was by any and all standards a master teacher, not to be compared to any teacher at all before or since.

Our school had one large room which accommodated all eight classes. The first row was assigned to the first grade, the second row to the second grade, the third row to the third grade, and so on, up to the eighth grade. While the first grade was busy practicing their penmanship, the second grade read aloud, and the third grade was learning math. I was fortunate to have this teacher until the first half of my fourth year in school, until the Germans entered our town in March of 1944, at which time our school, as all other Jewish schools in Hungary, was immediately closed. During those three and a half years I learned to read and write fluently, learned the multiplication table backwards and forwards, knew how to add, subtract, divide and multiply. I learned how to read and write the basic music scale; memorized poetry and songs. All this, while the rest of the classes were busy with other work. The most everlasting lesson I derived from this wonderful teacher was a lifelong love of learning. He made eternal students of us. I still cry over the fact that a person like this was forced to end his life in Auschwitz.

Everyday life of my childhood was totally incomparable to life around us as we know it today. The absolute conveniences, which by the way are not recognized as such, were non-existent yesterday. Just to get a fire going in the morning to cook breakfast required hard physical work, compared to turning a knob on a gas range. Long logs of firewood had to be purchased, stacked in a shed, and fine splinters were chopped to start a fire going in the wood-burning stove that was used for cooking. For heating the rooms, a coal-burning stove was used, but the fire was also started by using wood splinters. Since in our area there was no indoor plumbing, water was carried into the home from a well in the yard. A pail was let down and filled with water which was then carried into the home and emptied into containers. Drinking water was brought in from a well designated by the city as "fit for human consumption." In our area this particular well, which worked with a manual pump, was approximately half a block from our home. On Pesach, we used to accompany the maid to the well to make sure she did not put down the earthenware jugs onto the dusty road, which of course was not overly clean. Under such conditions, washdays, dishwashing, bathing, etc. were not easy matters.

We children also went along in the afternoons to the milking. Since milking the cows was done manually, we had to make sure that the person doing the milking washed her hands and was not eating while milking the cows. Our presence also served to render the milk *cholov Yisrael* since we watched over it. After reaching home, the milk was boiled in order to kill any bacteria (we

did not drink any raw milk). The top was skimmed and churned into butter in a special wooden butter-churner. My mother set up milk for yogurt and cheese, and of course we drank the milk too. It was rich and sweet.

We had fowl in our backyard – hens, roosters, ducks, geese and turkeys. We even had one goat which was milked daily, but the goat's milk was sold. Once a week we took some fowl to the *shochet* and my sister and I, both under ten years old, helped our mother to *kasher* them. Tell that to today's children! We also had two nice big gardens – one with all sorts of fruit trees, the other a vegetable garden. Since we only had the fruits and vegetables that grew in season, there were none in the winter months. The better part of the summer was spent putting up preserves in jars upon jars of assorted compotes and tomato sauces. All this required a lot of time and an inordinate expenditure of energy. It was part of life – not easy – but also nothing to complain about.

And so life went on. And if not for the outbreak of the Second World War, it probably would have continued in the same vein for many, many years to come. With the horses clipping and clopping on the cobblestone streets – pulling buggies – horse and carriage being mostly the exclusive means of transportation, except for trains to the bigger cities and an occasional car here and there.

It was, however, ordained from Heaven, and we had no idea to what an extent, that life as we knew it was not to be continued – at least not for us Yiden. The specter of anti-Semitism, never deeply hidden, was rearing its ugly head ever higher and higher, with Europe, as always, being its willing breeding ground. We kept hearing horrible stories from Poland and Germany, but, "the Hungarian government would never allow such things to happen." Even in 1942, when young Jewish boys and men were conscripted into forced labor camps, the population felt relatively safe. Yes, there were open incidents of anti-Semitism such as harassment, beatings, and business licenses refused to Jews, but mainly people tried to keep it low-key.

And then on March 16, 1944, the German army swept into our town, warmly welcomed by the local *goyim*. One after another, new laws were enacted. The Jewish school was closed, businesses were confiscated, and the Jewish population was to be quarantined into a ghetto, from where it would "be relocated East," into "working camps." We were only allowed to pack the bare necessities to take with us to the Ghetto, since each family received only one room in whichever house was allotted to them by the Germans. There we lived in uncertainty for about six weeks or so.

One morning there was a big commotion. The earth in the yard across from our house was completely dug up and turned over inch by inch. A family who owned a jewelry store and some other rich people lived there. It was rumored that they had hidden a lot of gold in the earth and in the well. Every single one of us, including old people and infants, had to go out and line the streets to witness the spectacle of how about ten men were ordered to climb up on a flatbed truck which was then driven out of the Ghetto. Nobody ever saw one of these men return again.

And then it was time for our own "relocation." The Ghetto was to be emptied. We were told, repeatedly, to carry the absolute minimum with us and leave everything else behind. Security guards roamed around at will, to make sure that orders were being carried out. Just when one of the guards entered our room, my mother was holding a fistful of photographs, including the only existing one of my grandmother. He flipped them roughly out of her hand, remarking in Hungarian, "Where they are taking you, you will have no further need of these." We were marched

out of the Ghetto, each person carrying whatever he was able to. My father had been away from home for long by now, having been conscripted into forced labor. My mother, with five young children in tow (myself being the oldest, at ten; my youngest sister one a half years old), and my old grandmother who lived with us — we marched along for many kilometers, while I carried the baby on my shoulders, until we arrived to some sort of farm, where we were quartered for the night in pig sties. We stayed on in that clearing for three days with the rain pouring down on us. My mother spread all available clothing on the branches of the trees, and parked us underneath, while the rainwater ran under us in rivulets. And then the sun came out and we were dry again. Then and there I learned that our skin is waterproof — I have never been hesitant to walk in the rain ever since.

We were taken to a brick factory in Debrecen, which was a large city and a collection center from all around the area. A brick factory is a very large area with no roof at all, except around its perimeter. We were extremely crowded, sitting on the stone floor, trying to avoid the rain. But the main terror, especially for a child, was the latrine. A deep ditch was dug, over which a long plank was extended, its ends supported by two large wooden X's. To sit on that narrow log in full view of everyone, with a deep ditch underneath... I still shudder. Finally, we were loaded, as so many cattle, into cattle cars, with one small window with iron bars on it. The doors were shut and the wagons began to roll. We children did not know — perhaps neither did the adults — that our destination was to be Auschwitz.

We passed Kassau; then the wagons were reversed and rolled back to their original point of departure. We started out again, passed Kassau again, and were turned back. This went on three times. The reason for this, we were told, was that the tracks had been bombed. However, parallel to us, other trains were rolling towards Auschwitz. After the war we found out that there were some very important people in our transport, and negotiations were going on by the Sternbuchs from Switzerland, who tried to save these peoples' lives. Meanwhile, inside the wagon, conditions were becoming unbearable. The overcrowding allowed for "standing room only." People were hallucinating, due to extreme hunger and thirst. It was quite terrifying. Finally, the doors were opened and we were made to disembark.

We had arrived in Strasshof, Germany. We were told to strip down, were deloused, and most everybody's hair was shorn. It was the first time in my life that I had ever seen people in a state of undress, walking from place to place. It was a very embarrassing experience. This was followed by a "Selection"; the stronger people were to be sent to work; the older ones, and women with children, like us, were stamped with a large X on the inside of our left wrists. We were given some garbage to eat in a metal cup, actually to slurp since spoons were non-existent. Since the food tasted terrible, and smelled even worse, and since my sister Rochel was a very skinny child and a terribly poor eater, my mother went in search of a spoon. Perhaps she could then force-feed her.

One of the Ukranian guards inquired what she was looking for and when he heard her answer, he told my mother: "Don't worry, where they will be taking you now, you will no longer need a spoon." This remark made my mother think that the next destination and the X's on our wrists were somehow connected. She raised the edge of her skirt, since that was all she had to work with, and with her spit was able to rub off the X. She repeated this again and again, worked on it the whole day, but by evening she had succeeded to rub off the X's with her own spit from all of our wrists. Then she hid us under the lowest wooden shelf in the barracks to which others were already assigned. Unbelievably, no one searched for us, and just as unbelievable was the fact that my sister, who was only a year and a half old, never ever gave out a loud sound, much

less cried, during the whole three days and three nights while we were hiding there. My mother scavenged whatever food she was able to find to ward off starvation.

After three days, EVERYBODY had to leave the barracks; we were again pushed into cattle cars and taken to Vienna into a family Lager. After the war was over, we found out that several families in Strasshof also rubbed off the X's from their wrists, and they also survived. This was a big *chesed* from our Creator.

There were approximately 300 inmates in our Lager, which was housed in an empty school building in the 10th District, on Schrankenberg Gasse 32. The majority of the people, mostly women and children, and some men as well, were from Mako, a Southern city in Hungary. Only four families, including ours, were from a different area. Thirty-six of us were assigned to one classroom on the second floor, bare except for the three-tiered wooden planks nailed all along the walls, on which we slept. Little by little, we abandoned everything on the way, since in our weakened state we could barely carry ourselves. The rest of the families, however, still had some clothing, covers, etc. Four families in our room donated one large pillow each, which was stitched together to form a quilt, and this was presented to my mother. Lying on the bare, narrow, wooden plank, the whole family kept warm under this heavenly cover during the cold winter months. To give, when you yourself barely have – that is true giving!

The Lager was situated across the street from the Anker Bread Factory, which up to a couple of years ago, was still intact. Some of the women were taken every morning to work there. The bread factory was being constantly bombed without ever sustaining a direct hit, perhaps in reciprocation for their lenient way of checking the workers when they returned at night to the Lager. My grandmother, who became paralyzed, never came down with us into the cellar during air raid bombings. She used to look out the window and count the bombs as they fell, reporting to my mother upon her return from work: "Today they dropped sixteen pieces; today they bombed four times!" She was not afraid at all. Interestingly enough, around Chanukah time, the Russians bombed an oil refinery on the outskirts of Vienna and it burnt for eight full days! We kept an eye on it, day in, day out. It was our Chanukah *lecht*.



A recent photograph of the Anker Bread Factory

The Lagers in Vienna were set up as showcases to the world. We had to write postcards to other countries, stating that we were in a sanatorium and were very well taken care of. There was no end to the lies the Germans spread to cover up their atrocities. Most of the people were forced to work in nearby forests, chopping down large trees, and the older children gathered up the branches. But –

as horrible as the food tasted, we had food, and a roof over our heads, no matter how freezing the building was in the winter. Eventually we were bombed, and the building suffered a direct hit, the very next day after a Gestapo inspection. Everyone was terrified of a visit by the Gestapo, even the Lagerführer. They were infamous for spreading death and destruction in their wake. I was fascinated by the most beautiful leather boots that they wore. They were shiny like a mirror. Everyone was inspected, even my grandmother, who was carried down for this occasion. We were told to work hard and then they left.

Then three miracles occurred: First, that shortly after the Gestapo inspection, there was an air raid. The building was bombed, sustaining a direct hit to our room, exactly where my grandmother had always sat at the window. But this time, because of the Gestapo's visit, she was in the cellar. The second miracle was where in the cellar the walls tumbled down. The cellar was divided into two large areas. In one, we Jews were allowed to stay; the second room was occupied by five or six Germans – our guards – and their radio equipment. The amazing thing was that the walls and all the rubble fell into their area, so they had to run out to our side of the cellar. The third miracle was that the falling stones and rubble totally blocked up the cellar door, barricading us completely. But simultaneously, the great force of the bomb had broken through the side wall of the cellar, creating a hole, and by forming a human pyramid we were able to climb out. Can you imagine if the bomb would have come down in our area?

We were herded into another large building but this too was destroyed by the heavy bombing. Finally, we were herded into trains again and taken to Theresienstadt. This was not too far from Vienna, a city in Czechoslovakia, formerly used as a deportation center. The Germans planned to use Theresienstadt as the final extermination camp of the leftover Jews, who were decimated beyond belief. The entire Ghetto area was mined and full of grenades. Fresh transports were brought in from Auschwitz, Mauthausen, Vienna and many outlying areas. The Jews from these transports were locked into an armory where typhus was rampant. Many, many people died daily, as a result of their former suffering and starvation.

The final destruction of Theresienstadt was not to be. Carl Rahm, a Nazi, in order to save his own skin, gave over the blueprints to the Red Cross in Switzerland, who were then able to deactivate the mines and grenades and so save a small remnant of Jews. On Tuesday, May 8, 1945, Theresienstadt was liberated by the Russians.

Epilogue: We were able to return to Hungary with the third transport to leave Theresienstadt in June, 1945. We found out that out of the 120 Jewish families in our town, only six families returned intact. One or two members of some families also returned, but mostly none of the others. My mother inquired by the Red Cross and by many and all organizations about my father's whereabouts, but to no avail. We were almost ready to imagine the worst, G-d forbid, when one day we spotted the names of a group of people who had been liberated in Wetzlar, and who were now waiting for the railroad tracks to be repaired, so that they should be able to return in the hope of finding their families. The very next morning after seeing this notice in the newspaper, there was a knock on our gate and when I opened it, I found a skeleton standing there. The last time I had seen my father in 1943 he was tall, broad-shouldered, smiling, with a full beard. Now, in August 1945, at perhaps forty-five kilo, after terrible sufferings, beatings, starvation, death marches and typhus, he was an absolute skeleton – but he was alive! And he came back to us! My mother, when we told her, just cried and cried. She couldn't stop crying, but these were tears of joy and happiness.

When my father sized up the situation and realized that there was hardly a *minyan* to *daven* with, he immediately made plans to re-locate us to Debrecen, a larger city, where the return rate



Front and back of “money” printed by the Germans in Teresienstadt in 1943, in an attempt to lend credence to the lie that Teresienstadt had been instituted as a Jewish “state”, where Jews lived in autonomy and harmony. These three bills were miraculously preserved by the author’s father, and they exist to this day!

was somewhat better and where a Jewish school was in progress already. The second thing my father did was to get in touch with his older sister who had immigrated to America in 1929. She sent us tickets to come to America, together with an affidavit from Mike Tress, attesting that my father would have a job in the U.S. and would not be a burden on the government. We boarded ship and arrived in New York on February 16, 1948. Just in the nick of time, right before the Communists sealed the border, not to re-open them again until the Hungarian revolution of 1956. We are grateful to this country for the peace and freedom it has granted us!

ROCHEL HOCHHAUSER



Rochel Hochhauser, née Swerdlin, was born in 1928 in Dolhinów, Poland. She moved to the United States in 1951 after living for a few years in Canada.

She has worked with bookkeeping and sales, but really excels at sewing—she used to make all the gowns for the family *simchos*!

Mrs. Hochhauser has three children, seventeen grandchildren and ten great-grandchildren. She lives in Boro Park.

ROCHEL HOCHHAUSER

Reminiscences from the Kitchen

Before the war in the *Alter Heim* I was a little girl, so I wasn't involved in cooking. But I watched sometimes when food was prepared. Especially the gefilte fish. But I remember liking tzimmes for Friday night. Tzimmes was a tradition – every household made tzimmes with a big kneidel. Sometimes we even ate some before Shabbos. It was always a big pot.

I got married, and I still make tzimmes. But I eliminated the kneidel, and instead of sugar, I cook it with raisins, “craisins”* or prunes. Instead of fat, I use water. My family loves tzimmes. It tastes good warm for Friday night, or in the summer cold for Shabbos lunch. Usually I cook it on Thursday night.

Carrot Tzimmes

2 lbs shredded carrots

A handful of raisins

2 cups of water

Cook 20-30 minutes

This side dish is very healthy, colorful, and delicious.

Ess gezunterheit!

When I got married I didn't know how to cook, because during the war food was scarce. So when I got married I looked for recipes. We used to buy the Yiddish newspaper, because we didn't know English yet. One of the recipes was a Sweet Potato and Apple Casserole. Since then I changed it several times, looking for shortcuts, since my family got bigger and I was working.

Sweet Potato & Apple Casserole – my latest version:

3 lbs sweet potatoes cooked in a pot with water to cover. Cook with the skins until soft. This takes about 20-30 minutes. When soft, peel and mash.

3 large Cortland apples, peeled and grated on a grater with the big holes.

Mix the apples and sweet potatoes together.

Spread the mixture in a baking pan. (There is no need to grease the pan.)

Topping: sprinkle some sugar and cinnamon, or brown sugar.

Bake it at 350° for about 1 hour.

This tastes good warm, or the next day at room temperature.

Enjoy! My family loves this dish.

* Dried cranberries

The following vegetable soup is my own creation! It is especially good when one is hungry after a fast in the summer, when the days are long.

Summer Vegetable Soup

1 lb carrots cut in wheels
½ lb string beans cut in pieces
1-2 potatoes cut in small pieces
2-3 small parsnips cut in wheels
1-2 small zucchini cut in wheels and put in the pot at the end, because zucchini cooks fast.
Salt and pepper to taste

I start cooking in the order I listed the ingredients. At the end you could season to taste with some instant soup mix (e.g. Osem). When I eat it, I put a little milk in my plate. It gives flavor, and it makes the hot soup cool down.

Enjoy! My family loves this soup. They ask for seconds!

EDITH KLEIN



Edith (Esther) Klein, née Friedman, was born in 1924 in Budrok Keresture, in Hungary. She came to the U.S. in 1959, where she established a busy life as a homemaker and *balebosteh*. She also worked in a grocery store. Mrs. Klein has six children, thirty-five grandchildren and ninety-four great-grandchildren! She lives in Boro Park.

EDITH KLEIN

Memoirs of My Life

(Translated to English by her daughter Rochel Schmidt)

I am trying to write about my life; both the pain and the good that I lived through. I was born in Budrok Keresture, Hungary in 1924. My dear mother was also born in Budrok Keresture. She bore seventeen children, yet managed to be a good mother to all of us. In spite of her many tasks she was also very regal, beautiful inside and out. My dear father was also a very special – not ordinary special, but an extraordinary person. He was born in Kisvarden. My parents had a very good marriage. My father, used to say to the mother of his seventeen children when she entered the room, "the sun has just entered our home."

We had a terrible heartache in the family. Three sons were lost. Volve and Mechel were twin soldiers who died in the Russian Army. Hershu was married with five beautiful children; all eaten up by the flames of Auschwitz. I also had a sister, Tzirue, who had five children. I was living with her when the war began. I was eighteen years old. Her husband was drafted into the army, fighting amidst dangerous mines with hidden bombs. She was afraid to live alone so I lived with her, helping her care for the children. He survived the army only to be taken to the concentration camp with us. He survived the horrors of the war too, but was destined to die of typhus right before the liberation.

On March 9th 1944, the Nazis, the murderers, came into power. From that day on, we lived in terror. We had to wear a yellow star on our chest or else we couldn't go out into the street. In the middle of the star was written "Jude". The Nazis chased us out of our home and took it over. We had to leave everything behind except for a few pieces of linen. We were taken to the ghetto of Nireghazara. There was a small room into which they crammed five people, beside the children and us. We could hardly breathe. I stuck my head out of the small window to breathe oxygen. We hungered, as they gave us nothing to eat. I went collecting food for the five children. We were there for three weeks.

At the same time, the Klein family, Ilonka, Latzie, Yitzchuk Aizik and Eliyohu (they also had another son whose name I don't recall), came to the same ghetto. Eliyohu came back from the Russian army. He did hard labor there, carrying heavy trees for two long years. I saw how, in the early morning, Eliyohu got hold of potatoes and flour, cooked it and brought it to his parents. He was a good son as you can see. The Klein family was very *balbatish*. The father learned in the Pajon Yeshiva. He was renowned for his smartness. One day they cut off the beards of all the Rebbes and men. I saw them do it.

Soon we were relocated to yet another ghetto called Nyirespuszta. They put us into a tobacco farm. The living conditions were just terrible. The roof was so inadequate that it rained inside almost as much as it rained outside. At night, the water ran down our backs. We slept on the floor of the tobacco barn, all together – Tzirue, her husband, who now joined us, the five children, and me. There were of course no pillows or anything decent.

I went collecting food again. There was a very special Rebbe, Reb Shulem Lazer. I don't remember his second name. (His wife, the righteous Rebbetzin, died in the ghetto. No one was allowed to go to the *levaya* except for two people. She was still considered lucky, as she was buried altogether outside of the ghetto. After the war, they came for her remains, and buried her

in a Jewish cemetery.) Some Jews from overseas wanted to smuggle this holy Rebbe Shulem Lazer out of the ghetto but he refused to go. He said firmly, "I will never abandon my flock!" And he didn't. He continued to give guidance to his fellow Jews, and he died with them in the concentration camp of Auschwitz.

We hungered a lot with the children on this tobacco farm. One Friday morning, they suddenly threw us, like dogs, into wagons. They beat the elderly with sticks as they couldn't hurry fast enough. Then they herded us up unto cattle cars. The train ride lasted for a day and a half, without food or water. The first of Shavuot, the day we received the Torah, we arrived in Auschwitz.

The murderer Mengele had people lined up in rows of five, and pointed his index finger right and left. Those he pointed to the right lived; those he pointed to the left were gassed immediately. How terrible, how awful, this was! In the arms of the Yiddishe mothers were their babies, and they were gassed together with their babies, holding them tight. My parents, Tzirue with her family, and I, all arrived to Auschwitz the very same day. My parents came in the morning. By the time we arrived they were no longer alive. They were gassed immediately and shoveled into the crematorium.

In my own arms I was holding a baby of a few months' age; Tzirue's baby. A kapo whispered in my ear, "put the child down." Somehow, I listened. Then I was suddenly in front of Mengele. He pointed me to the right. I was young and strong, twenty years old. In back of me was my sister Tzirue, holding a child in her arms. She was pointed to the left. Those on the left – I felt so sorry for them!

There was a mother, whose nine children were taken, some out of her arms, some from between her legs and some under her aprons. All nine children were thrown to the left and she, the mother, was pushed to the right. I remember thinking, "How is she able to bear this – Ribono shel olom! Oh, I write these terrible painful memories with big heartache! When I looked around, I no longer saw my sister. She had already been ushered to the gas chambers.

Those of us sent to the right were shorn and bathed. Everyone got a random dress. When I turned around and saw that I didn't recognize anyone among the masses of people, I panicked and ran out. I crouched low, behind the barracks, bending very low so that the watchman didn't see me, or else he would have shot me immediately. I noticed the big tall chimneys – many chimneys with lots and lots of smoke. First the Jews were gassed through the shower faucets. Then they were burned in the crematorium. I was thinking about my parents being gassed and burned as I ran, looking for some familiar faces. I was hoping to find some of my sisters alive.

I saw the barbed wires on top of the gates. If you touched the gates, you were electrocuted and died instantly. I continued to run and run, still looking for my sisters. Then, suddenly I found them, all five huddled together. My cousin Judy Freidman who was living with us at the time was there as well. I would not have survived if not for them. I got terribly ill with typhus. My sister Chayu nursed me back to health. We shared our food with each other. We also supported each other. If one was weak, the other held her up. If one was starving more than the others, we gave her our food. At three in the morning they awoke us to the number call. It was freezing, and we only had a thin black sack of a dress. The number call took three hours. We warmed each other with our body warmth, until they counted all 1,500 of us. Then they gave us bitter coffee, void of sugar or milk. We got a loaf of bread and we rationed it for the day. Of course, we included our cousin Judy too, in everything.

They gave us barley soup. We closed our noses and poured it down our throats, as it stank and was also very bitter. They put some bitter herbs into the food to stop our menstrual cycles. During the day it was very hot in Auschwitz and at night it was very cold. The pregnant women jumped up and down the hill, up and down, up and down to miscarry the pregnancy. There was a female doctor who helped these women miscarry to save their lives. Thankfully, this kind doctor survived the war.

We were in long barracks with live wires separating one barracks from the other. There were 1,500 prisoners in each barracks. We slept, squeezed together like herrings, on four tiers of wooden landings, called beds. On each landing slept twelve people. It was so tight, we could barely breathe. One was not able to turn right or left. If one person was sick, which was almost always, everyone sharing the wooden plank got sick too. Out in the yard, they tattooed our arms. I was tattooed with the number 12391. We were in the C barracks. In barracks B were 1,500 women from Czechoslovakia. One night all the prisoners from barracks B were suddenly gassed and burned. Why? They needed the space for the new crop of prisoners that had just arrived. Poor souls, they ended their lives so tragically.

In September 1944, German Nazi women took us to Markleberg, Germany, to work in an airplane factory. The food was the same as before – garbage. There was no hot water and we washed ourselves in icy water. They gave us a uniform, the color gray. We had to wash it in the icy cold water. The food, like I said, was very bad. There were bombs – many bombs. The Nazi women ran to the bunkers for shelter and left us to die from the bombs.

In January, 1945, the war ended. The Jews of Auschwitz were liberated, but we at the airplane factory were still held captive. In April 1945 they said we were free but they did not let us go. The SS Nazis herded the Jews from the airplane factory and took us on a death march for three weeks. They didn't give us any food for the road. We were weak, we could barely walk. Those who could not walk at all were put into carts. They were carried away into the forest and left to die a slow death of starvation and exhaustion.

Bombs were also erupting all over us as we walked on and on. Many of us died from these falling bombs. We got more and more exhausted. If they would have taken us for just one more hour, these German dogs, we too would have died before we reached Theresienstadt. Finally, we were liberated. We were finally, really free!

The JOINT, an American help organization, made a soup kitchen for us. We ate, rested, and cleaned up for a short while. Then they directed us back to Hungary, then Budapest, and finally to our home town, Budrok Kerestur, where I was born. Our kitchen had been used as a horse barn by the German Nazis. All the windows were broken and every single thing, every item, every shred of anything, was taken out of the house.

On May 9, 1945, Eliyohu Klein came back. He had survived two concentration camps, Dachau and Auschwitz. I immediately remembered him from the Ghetto of Nireghazara. I also remembered his dear parents, sister and brother. Eliyohu had also been on a death march. (On his back was a skeleton of a man who could no longer walk. Eliyohu had saved him by carrying him for some time. I don't know how he did this but he did. He was a good man, very strong and selfless. The man survived and moved to Israel where he raised a fine family.) Eliyohu Klein asked me to marry him, but he was quite a bit older than me so I hesitated. He left Budrok Kerestur, rejected and very sad. Immediately, I regretted what I had done, and sent him a telegram to

come back. He hurried back. We got married on February 19, 1946.

My sister Roizu, our cousin Judy, and I, all got married the same day. We also wore the same wedding gown. One had their wedding in the morning, the other in the afternoon and I had our wedding at night. There was one *se'udah* for all of us. My cousin Judy's groom Bebu got a hold of a chicken. My sister Rifku *kashered* it. There was also a goat that we *shechted* and served to the guests with farfel. My sister Ettu cut my hair after the wedding, but it was hard to find something to cover my head with. Finally, we found a large table cloth from which we made a scarf for each of us. We also had enough material to sew a robe. My husband borrowed a hat from his brother Latzi. He also borrowed fake flowers for me to hold from his friend Miklos.

Like my parents, we had a wonderful marriage. We lived together for sixty-two good years. The years went quickly, too quickly. We had six children who are all good children with very nice families, all *frum* and yiddish. We were very grateful for this. Then on June 17, 2006, G-d took him from me. My dear husband is sleeping forever in his resting place. I continue to mourn him but I also have very good memories that fill my days.

I try to forget the past, the terror of the war and concentrate on my good memories, but I cannot. I worry. I need my children and grandchildren to know how we survived. The war must not be forgotten. Now that I wrote it down, I feel better; knowing the truth is documented for the future generations. If they carry the memories, I can rest. If they hold the pain, I can let it go and concentrate on the beauty of my life.

So, please remember...

EVA LOB



Eva (Penina) Lob, née Spitzer, was born in 1933 in Szamosujvár, in Romania.

She came to the U.S. in 1948, and achieved a Master's Degree in Social Work, as well as post-graduate training in Family Therapy. She worked as a psychotherapist and social worker for many years, and now teaches dancing as a second career.

Mrs. Lob has two children, six grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

She lives in Boro Park.

EVA LOB

Memories from the Hungarian Ghetto

Our apartment was designated as part of the Jewish Ghetto in Budapest, the capital of Hungary. My family consisted of my mother and her mother, (my grandmother); and my two older siblings. My brother was four years older at age fifteen and my sister, at thirteen, was two years my senior. Our father had to join a Forced Labor Camp, just as all able-bodied Jewish men were taken. We saw him briefly a few times, then never heard or saw him again. As the youngest, I was spoiled and protected, especially by my father, grandmother and brother.

When the Ghetto was formed around 1944, our apartment building had some gentiles residing there. Now they had to move out of the ghetto, and naturally, they moved to nicer and bigger apartments. Such a family had been living on our floor, a family consisting of parents with an only child, a girl. This girl was around my age, and spent a lot of time playing with me and enjoying my lively household. Their apartment was tiny, consisting of one bedroom and a kitchen. In comparison, we lived in a large apartment; a living room and two bedrooms and a kitchen.

One incidence clearly stands out in my memory. As mentioned before, as the youngest, I was over-protected and often ignored. Therefore, when my mother requested that I go out of the ghetto to the home of this gentile friend I was amazed. It meant that I had to leave the Jewish neighborhood to go to an unsafe and strange place. In the Ghetto, everyone had to wear a yellow star; this was to identify the individual as a Jew. Of course, I had to leave the star at home. I usually was a scared child but I do not remember being afraid. Instead, I felt very grown up and proud to be chosen to do this for my family. We needed food. The interesting thing about this incident was that I cannot recall what I got to take home. Instead, what struck me when I entered the apartment of my friend, was that it was huge. (It had probably been vacated by a Jewish family, who were forced to move into the Ghetto.) Even more striking to me was the fact that they were hanging curtains at the windows. It was such a "normal" activity, yet to my child's eyes it was so far from my life and world. Our life was a struggle for survival, fear of the Nazis and the future, whereas my friend and her family had no clue of the life we led. We are concerned for lack of food and they are fixing up their apartment. After the war, I had nothing to say to my friend; she was a child, and I had lost my childhood.

I lost my father and my dearest brother, who snuck upstairs while we all had to live in the cellar, due to rockets and bombs thrown at us constantly. He most probably helped our neighbors, which was what he liked to do. He was found dead weeks later in our bombed-out apartment. Needless to say, my sister and I still mourn our father and brother.

I got married young, to a very supportive and loving husband and created two wonderful and accomplished children. I had been a high school drop-out but got my GED, and with the help and encouragement of my husband I slowly got my B.A. and M.S.W. I practiced individual, marital and family counseling for a number of years. Now I am enjoying my retirement, spending some time with my grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Experiencing some hard times prepared me to appreciate my life and strengthened me to cope better.

ILI MARKOVITZ



Ili (Chava Leah) Markovitz, née Spitzer, was born in 1930 in Budapest, Hungary.

She immigrated to the United States in 1965. She is very artistically talented and enjoys painting.

Mrs. Markovitz is the mother of three children, who, in turn, have given her ten grandchildren. She lives with her husband in Boro Park.

ILI MARKOVITZ

Recollections

In the summer of 1943, I went to my father's parents for vacation. They lived in a town called Sárbogáro. I would play with my cousin who was two years younger than I. I didn't go there often, because my grandmother was very strict. I remember how she would always say that I don't have to like my food, it has to like me! She said it so often, it was literally coming out of my ears!

My grandmother owned a big garden where she grew fruits and vegetables. We would pick a small basket of vegetables in the morning and some fruit in the afternoon. One Friday evening, my grandfather came home from *shul* and told us that the NYILOS was having a meeting in the movie theater. He did not want to worry us, so he conducted the meal normally, without hurrying. My grandfather made Kiddush, we ate, and talked, and went to bed.

Just as I started to fall asleep, I heard voices from the street. Next moment, the window pane cracked and fell over my head to the floor (my bed was right under the window.) B"H, I was not hurt, but I was frozen with shock for two minutes! When I calmed down a little, I jumped out of bed, and ran to my grandparents' bedroom. My grandmother told me that I must go back to bed. She assured me that these people wouldn't come again.

On Sunday night I slept at my aunt's house. She lived across the street from my grandparents. Three days later we woke up in middle of the night, to the ringing church bells. This meant more trouble. We ran out to the garden, and we saw the haystack burning. Sárbogáro was near the border of Yugoslavia, and there were many partisans there. The partisans had set fire to everything. I was happy when the summer was over and I was able to return home to my parents. This was the last time I saw my father's parents. And this was the year that my grandfather blew the *shofar* for his *kehilla* on Rosh Hashana. I am very proud of this.

After the war, I got stuck in communist-occupied Budapest. According to the communist law, I had to work on Shabbos. I worked in a factory in Budapest, and I did not want to work on Shabbos. There was one bookkeeper who was also *shomer shabbos* and he came up with a plan. He told us to come to the factory on Shabbos, but to join a social activities group instead of doing work. So we would talk about the news, etc. When they asked me what I wanted to read, I said the front and back pages of the newspaper. The front of the newspaper summarized the news. This was good for me, because I did not have patience to read the whole thing. The back page was about sports, which I didn't mind!

But – they were not happy with my answer. They said I must join the culture group. The culture group was a group that sang or acted out some kind of story. The stories were usually about a communist event or holiday. Since I was friendly with the woman in charge, I asked her if I could be her helper. I thought that this would be easier for me. But after a while she wanted me to add something more to the group. She suggested that I read a poem. She even found a poem for me, but I didn't like the one she chose. So I looked for a poem myself, and found a very beautiful one. When I showed it to her, she advised me not to say who the author of the poem was. The poet was Yehuda HaLevi. I listened to her advice and did not announce the author. Without knowing who wrote the poem, everyone congratulated me and complimented my



The author as a young woman, performing in her factory's culture group

choice.

* * *

When my husband had his birthday a few years ago, my daughter told her sons to call and wish him a Happy Birthday. All three of them called and wished him a Happy Birthday. In the evening, our son-in-law came over to our house to tell us what had happened. That night when he came home, his seven year-old son, our grandson Mendy, ran to open the door for him. He was very excited. He told his father "You know somebody in our family has a birthday today!? I won't tell you who, but I'll give you a hint. It's one of our grandfathers, but not your father!" We thought this was a very smart comment for such a little boy. B"H, we have rebuilt our family and we see *nachas* from our children!

GOLDA MOSHKOVICH



Golda Moshkovich, née Svimmer, was born in 1926 in Munkacs, then in Czechoslovakia, now in the Ukraine.

She was finally able to move to the US in 1979, and built a home for her family, enjoying cooking and baking, as well as being proficient in crocheting and knitting.

Mrs. Moshkovich has three daughters, four grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren. She lives in Boro Park.

GOLDA MOSHKOVICH

My Life

My maiden name was Svimmer (pronounced with a “sh” sound). I was born in Mukačevo, a town in the Trans-Carpathian region of the Carpathian mountain range. Among the Jewish community, it was referred to as “Minkatch.” Our town had a diverse, thriving Jewish community. While this area was once part of the Ottoman Empire and later the Austro-Hungarian Empire, when I was born, in 1926, it was part of Czechoslovakia. As long as it was under Czech control, life was good for the Jewish community. The Czechoslovakian government neither established, nor supported, anti-Semitic policies.

Our family had lived in the Carpathians Mountains for many generations and we considered ourselves Carpathian Jews. We lived on 15 Dankova Street. Our family was very religious. Our legal names were the same as our Jewish names. When I was in school, my name was translated by the teachers in Czechoslovakian schools as Zlata, and in Hungarian schools as Aranka. I was the oldest of seven children. I had four sisters and two brothers. My mother was Ester (Klein) Svimmer, and my father was Solomon (Shulem-Yossel) Svimmer. Everyone called him Yossel. Both of my parents were born in 1902.

My maternal grandmother’s name was Perl and my mother’s father was called Shvartzer Leibish Klein. He was called that because there was another Leibish in town who was known as Veisser (white) Leibish; and since my grandfather’s skin was so dark, they called him Shvartzer (black) Leibish. He had a small yeshiva of older boys past the age of Bar Mitzvah. The students there were especially learned. This is how he eked out a modest living. My mother’s brother, Avigdor, took over the yeshiva in 1929 after my grandfather passed away. I was a small child then.

My paternal grandfather was Yitzchak Mechel Svimmer and grandmother was Miriam Schlessinger. They had eight children. My grandfather owned a dry-goods store and my grandmother used to help him with his business. My father and my grandfather were Belzer chassidim. They were close to the Belzer Rebbe and would go join him for *davening* before every Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. We had many relatives living nearby in our town.

Unfortunately, in 1938, the Hungarians took over Mukačevo and it became known as Munkács. By 1939 the whole region was under Hungarian control. That same year, the Hungarians confiscated our store.

One cold April morning in 1944, two days after Pesach, the Hungarian gendarmes took us to a ghetto in Munkács. The ghetto was formerly the Shayevich brickyard, which had been owned by a Jewish family before the Hungarians confiscated it. Many Jewish families from the region were brought there. It was a transition point between their homes and the camps. My family was not there for very long; shortly thereafter, in May, we were taken to the trains bound for Auschwitz. We were herded together into the cattle cars, people of all ages, with room neither to sit nor stand. Of course, there was no toilet, nor food, nor water. Many people died on those trains. The living and the dead together, without room to breathe.

When we arrived at Auschwitz, inmates already there told people to leave their belongings in

the train cars because most of the people would go directly into the crematoriums. They organized us into two lines and the elders, children and frail people were sent straight to the crematoriums to die. Those of us chosen for work were told to undress, brought to a shower, and shaved. They gave us used dresses of unknown origin. The dresses had a red stripe down the back to signify our status as inmates. We also received shoes with wooden bottoms.

Those people that were not selected for work were told to undress, and were also taken to a shower that was really a gas chamber. After they were gassed, the floors opened up and the bodies were dumped into a cellar and then burned in the crematoriums.

I was the only one of my family that was chosen for work. I was sixteen, young and healthy. My father, my mother, and my siblings were all sent immediately to the gas chamber. My sister Toby was fifteen-and-a-half, Malka was fourteen-and-a-half, Leibish was twelve-and-a-half; it was just a short while before he was to become a Bar Mitzvah. Yankel was nine, Chaya was six and Devora was four.

At Auschwitz, we had to appear for counting twice a day. This procedure was called Zählenappell. Our names were not called; only our heads were counted. The process took hours and happened in any weather. We were often cold. We did not have coats, or underwear, or socks. We bundled our feet in newspaper that we found. If the correct number of heads did not appear, we would have to wait, often for hours.

In our days there, there was hardly ever any food. We survived mostly on the soup. The water was mixed with chemicals that stopped our menstruation and made us weak and docile. To this day, I have health problems that are a result of that soup.

After six weeks at Auschwitz, some of us were sent into a “shvitz,” a sauna. I was kept there the whole night – it was terrible. Early in the morning they gave us gray dresses with numbers on the left side. Then we were transferred by ship to the Stutthoff concentration camp, where I remained for another six weeks.

During the rest of the war I was shuffled between the other labor camps of Lubich, Legeinova, and Teshin. There we were made to dig underground bunkers and trenches. Towards the end, the whole work camp was evacuated to go to Proust near an air field (not far from Danzig).

It was a harsh winter and the frost and snow were numbing. We walked on our death march for two weeks from the work camp to Proust. We slept in barns at night and some people froze to death. If anyone fell, or even bent to fix their shoe, they were shot immediately. Thousands became hundreds. Their bodies marked the path we took. Towards the end, I got sick with typhus. The Russians, who finally liberated me in Proust, took me to the hospital. I was half-dead.

After I recovered in the hospital, I went back to Munkács. It was a June day in 1945. I found no one after the liberation. My parents, all my siblings, my grandparents, my aunts, uncles, and cousins were gone. Almost all of them were gassed and cremated. I came from the camps alone. No one came back.

Later that year I discovered that my two aunts – my father’s sisters – and one cousin were alive. One of these aunts was now living in Budapest. She had been saved by Raoul Wallenberg, who had given her new papers. My cousin who was saved is now living in Israel.

I went to Budapest to visit my aunt and stayed with her a week, but then I returned to Munkács because I heard a rumor that my father might still be alive – he wasn't. I wanted to return to Budapest but by then the border had been closed. I was caught crossing a long bridge over the Tisa river, near Chust. I was with an acquaintance from Chust who also wanted to go to Budapest and from there to Israel. I was thrown in jail by the Russians but let out a week later. I never returned to Munkács. My family was gone and it was no longer my home.

I stayed in Chust and there, in 1946, I met my first husband, Moshe Katz who was also a camp survivor. After we married, I grew to love him very much. We had a little daughter a year later. I named her Ester, after my mother. She looks so much like her father, and like him, she has a gentle character.

In 1947 my husband was killed. Moshe was going to work one day, and as he reached his place of employment, he was shot by the "Banderas." Banderas were the Ukrainian nationalists who sided with the Germans and continued to kill Jews who returned from the camps. They often hid in the woods. I was left with an infant daughter who was only six months old.



The author as a young newly-married woman

Over the next nine-and-a-half years, I lived alone with my daughter. I struggled to make ends meet and provide for the two of us. I had no one to help me. I took my daughter to work with me because there was no day care at the time and there was no other way for us to get money to eat. Life was hard and we didn't have many choices.

In 1956, I met my second husband, Vilgem (Volf) Moshkovich. He loved my Ester, and that was very important to me. I appreciated what a good man he was. He was very cultured. His humor was very wry and dry. I laughed and loved again. In 1957 we were blessed with a daughter, whom we named Malka after my Volvi's mother. In 1959 we were blessed again with daughter, Piri. When the kids grew a little older they went to kindergarten and I went to work. I became the Director of a large supermarket from 1963 to 1978, at which time we received papers to come to the US. Ester, my oldest daughter, had immigrated to the US in 1975 and had settled in New Jersey with her husband and my first granddaughter.

Finally, in April 1979, we were all together again and spent Pesach together in a free land! Soon after our arrival, Volvi and I decided to live in Boro Park rather than in New Jersey, because of the close-knit Orthodox community there. In 1983, I visited Israel together with my husband. I *davened* at the Kotel, and met my aunt Rivka (nicknamed Richa), who had lived in Budapest, for the first time since the war.

Sadly, in 1989 my Volvi had a stroke and lingered, holding on to life, until he passed away in 1996. In 1998 I visited Israel again and stayed with my aunt Rivka, and we reminisced together about the whole family, and the good old days in the “*alter heim*”.

I have survived many bitter experiences in my life, but I take solace in my children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Boruch Hashem, I have a good family!

DOLLY RABINOVICH



Dolly (Shaindy) Rabinovich, née Spitz, was born in Berehovo (Beregszasz) in Czechoslovakia.

She came to the United States in 1949.

Mrs. Rabinovich went to High School in America, and trained as a bookkeeper, which was her career for many years. She enjoys socializing with others, reading and traveling—by now she has visited quite a few countries!

She lives in Boro Park.

DOLLY RABINOWITZ

Glimpses of My Childhood – Danger and Survival

I am now setting out to briefly tell my history as a Holocaust survivor. I was born in Berehovo (Beregszasz) Czechoslovakia, in a prosperous, Orthodox family. My father, Solomon Spitz, was a successful flour and wine businessman. We lived in a beautiful house. Next to it, there was a large empty lot, which father donated to a congregation, called Assei Chessed, where a beautiful synagogue was built. It still stands there today and is used by the few remaining Jews of the town.

Several years ago, my brother and sister with families and myself took a trip to Beregszasz. It was a very emotional journey to our birthplace and to the house we grew up in. Now illegal aliens are residing there.

Our life was peaceful, happy and tranquil in Czechoslovakia. Father was a host to several famous Rabbis, among them the Munkacser Rebbe, the Minchas Eliezer, who interrupted his summer vacation in Marienbad to be the *sandek* at my brother Elie's *bris*.

However, in March 1944, my whole family – together with all the town's Jews – was ordered to leave our happy home. We were taken to the town's brick factory which had become the ghetto. This was the end of our peaceful life. We were ordered to take only the minimum of our belongings. Consequently we painfully packed only the essentials – clothing, jewelry, prayer books and some food. My mother anticipated hardship and was wise enough to hide the jewelry and sewed it into shoulder pads, suit hems and cuffs.

After some time in the cramped ghetto, all Jews were herded onto cattle wagons under inhumane conditions, and taken to the infamous Auschwitz/Birkenau Concentration Camp. Here the SS separated families and the selection by the evil Dr. Mengele began. It was the last time I saw my loving parents.

Because of my young age, I was selected for some kind of experimentation. Miraculously it did not take place, and instead I was tattooed and sent to work at the railroad, where all the luggage and valises of our people were left. This area was also called the "Brezsinka". There were huge mountains of piled-up luggage. We were ordered to make separate piles of clothing, shoes, eyeglasses, jewelry, etc. Information of hidden jewelry sewn into garments must have reached the Gestapo, because they made us rip and slit open garments to find the hidden jewels and put them into bins.

I could write pages upon pages of the suffering and atrocities we had to endure, some of them too gruesome to write or read about. I soon found out why I had never seen my parents and family again, when the S.S. pointed to the endless smoke coming from the crematoriums.

On January 18, 1945, I was on the death march, the last transport to leave Auschwitz on foot. Were it not for Hashem and my two sisters who supported me, holding me up and dragging me to finish this march, I would not be here today. The road was filled with dead bodies – people who had not been able to make the march. Hunger, fatigue, frostbite were only some of the misery we endured.



The author as a young new American, in the late 1940's

On May 2, 1945, we were, *boruch Hashem*, liberated. Wandering from Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, the search for our surviving family began. In Budapest we met our oldest brother. We didn't stay there long for fear of Soviet Communism and left to Austria, and then on to a D.P. camp in Germany. The Hebrew Immigration Aid Society was helping Holocaust Survivors find a country to start a new life.

In August 1949, I landed on the shores of the U.S.A. The destination was Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. My wish was to finish high-school and join my married brother in New York City – to live once again with a complete family. Without any skill, but with a desire to improve my standard of life, I enrolled in a bookkeeping course. After completing the course, an office job was available. Establishing a new life after the Holocaust took time, hard work, and persistence.

In 1960 I married David Rabinovich, a warm, sensitive, and compassionate man. Sadly, we were childless and after several years of marriage we were divorced. I have, *boruch Hashem*, always been very close with my sisters and brothers, their children and grandchildren. They are in essence my family. Their *simcha* is my *simcha* in every conceivable way. My strong feeling for *Yiddishkeit* and faith in Hashem sustained me all these years, and have given me joy and happiness and for that I am eternally grateful to Hashem. I pray that I continue to see *nachas* and joy in my family and all of Klal Yisroel!

As a child I was guided by my parents and, in particular, inspired by my mother who was a *tzadekes*. I would like to think of myself as a sincere, honest and sensitive person; who receives pleasure in helping others. And finally, I would like to encourage young people to be respectful, and impress upon them to seek guidance in Dovid Hamelech's beautiful Tehillim.

Last, but not least, I wish to express my sincere appreciation and praise to Club Nissim, with its dedicated director, Simonne H, and assistant, Esther G, and other staff, who initiate, organize, and schedule imaginative programs of health, information, exercise, entertainment, spirituality, trips, and numerous other programs. In summary, it is a life saver to the elderly Holocaust Survivors. May Hashem help you to continue the good work!

SARA SEIDMAN



Sara Seidman, née Abraham, was born in 1922 in Turda, Romania.

She was a Beth Jacob teacher for several years in Europe, before coming to the U.S. in 1949. Here she continued teaching, but later took up a second career as a bookkeeper.

Mrs. Seidman has four children and—*bli ayin hora*—a number of grandchildren; she doesn't like to count her great-grandchildren.

She lives in Kensington.

SARA SEIDMAN

My Family During the War

To understand how things worked in our household, I have to introduce you to my family. My mother, Margit Abraham, (née Wesel), was twenty-six years old when her mother died. She was selected by her older sisters to move in with their father, Rabbi Bentzion Wesel of Turda, Romania. She became, in addition to being a wife and mother, a Rebbetzin and nurse to her asthmatic father. In the 1930's doctors believed that the treatment for asthma and allergies was to spend time among trees, incredible as it sounds to us today, when we know about the effect of pollen on allergies. I leave it to your imagination how much devotion she showed in caring for her father for sixteen years, as well as being the surrogate mother to her siblings. Who took care of us children when my mother had to stay in the hospital or a spa with her father? My grandfather's sister or an older cousin took care of us.

My mother's oldest sister, Rebbetzin Tzirel Klein, died young in childbirth. Her daughter, Madie Schlesinger, lived in Paris. Madie spent every summer vacation in our house. When Madie was expecting her first child, she was understandably nervous, due to the experience of her mother in childbirth. She left modern Paris to come to Turda to be surrounded by the comforting presence of my mother. Her first child, Renée, was born in December 1930, in our home.

My mother was very organized and prepared food for the entire year according to the season. In the spring, she made *lukshen* (noodles) for the entire year. In the summer, she prepared wheat for matzos and preserved each fruit and vegetable when it ripened. In the fall, she made wine and *lekvar* (plum marmalade), and stored apples and carrots for the winter. Her sister, Rebbetzin Hinde Serel Adler, was a sickly woman and mother of eight. Some of the food my mother prepared went to her sister. In addition, when her sister's seventeen year-old son developed a touch of tuberculosis, he moved into our house for many months to be closer to his specialist in Klausenburg. My mother, who was an excellent nurse, took care of him.

After my grandfather was *niftar*, his oldest son-in-law, Rabbi Yosef Adler, became Rabbi of Turda. My mother lost her official job as Rebbetzin, but people were used to turning to her for help and she continued to assist them. We moved from the Rabbi's house on one side of the Shul to the other side, which was still the property of the Kehilla.

At the beginning of the war, a crazed man once came to our town. Everyone was scared of him, and locked their doors. Only my father invited him in, and calmed him down enough to tell us what happened. He was one of 250 Jewish men on reserve duty for the Romanian Army. The Romanians had ordered them to line up opposite each other and shoot the soldier opposite them. Whoever shot the other, would be allowed to live. Silence. Nobody shot. Except this one man. The soldiers, enraged, finished the rest of them off, and true to their word, let the lone man go free. But he was far from free, and filled with terrible guilt and trauma.

Somehow my father kept his presence of mind, and provided great comfort for this troubled man, by pointing out that he was now a witness to the deaths of these Jewish soldiers. He sent him from rabbi to rabbi to investigate and document the names of the slain men, thus allowing their wives to be free to remarry, when the time might arise. Today, I know some of these wom-

en who were able to remarry, due to the testimony of our distressed guest.

During the war, when the Jewish population was forced to having six people live in one room, our two front bedrooms were to become the *Kehilla* offices. The back part of the house was occupied by an elderly crippled couple and their attendant. We were left with two rooms, one of which was windowless, plus a large, once fancy, porch. That porch became our “guest dining room” and a storage area for men who *davened* in the shul to keep their *taleisim* on the shelves where flowers in planters used to bloom. After *davening*, the men had to run to fulfill their obligations to the King, i. e. forced labor.

A small burner became our stove, where milk was boiled daily for 40-60 refugee and orphaned children. We owned only a few glasses, so my father had to keep washing them while my mother prepared the food. He would bring water inside from a spigot in the courtyard and wash and rinse the glasses over and over again. He did this every day for two and a half years, even through the freezing winters. The children, bundled up, came every day to be comforted by the warm milk and the delicious *lekvar* sandwiches.

To understand how much work went into preparing just one of my mother’s specialties, I will include her recipe for Lekvar, or Plum Marmalade, below:

Equipment needed:

1. 30-gallon copper kettle with a rounded bottom
2. tripod to fit the kettle
3. L-shaped wooden ladle, sturdy and comfortably shaped; long enough to reach the bottom of the kettle and keep hands away from the fire
4. chopped wood, enough to burn 24 to 36 hours

Ingredients:

As many bushels of washed and pitted Italian plums as needed, to fill and refill the boiling plums in the kettle.

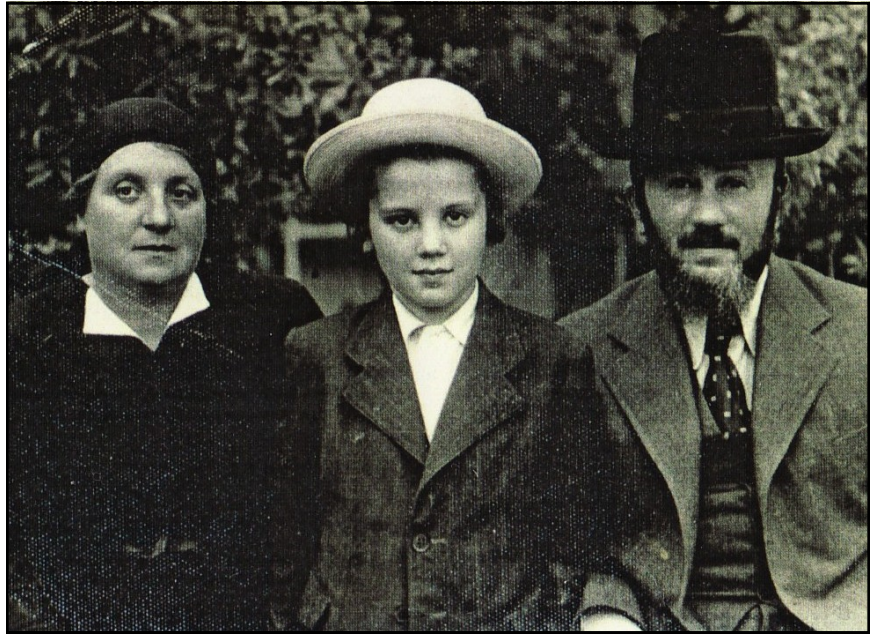
Time:

24-36 hours of non-stop stirring of the boiling plums in the kettle, until the plums transform into marmalade (lekvar, such as in *Hamentaschen* filling).

When I was a child, bread with prune lekvar was my favorite food. But I did not consume that much lekvar, believe me!

Immediately after the war was over, monies arrived from America to Romania to be given to the Jewish *kehillos*. Since my grandfather was the President of the Orthodox Communities of Transsylvania, he was notified to come to the government office to discuss proper usage of the money. However, since he was sick, my father went in his stead. A representative of the Neolog community was also present. My father wanted to use the money to rebuild the *kehillos*, and schools, and to help the Jews rebuild their lives. The Neolog representative had other ideas. He did not want the money to be used for anything religious; he preferred clubs and the like. After all, Romania had become a communist country in September 1944.

Unable to resolve their differences, my father began to leave. The governor called him aside and said: "There is going to be a big conference of the Orthodox organization in the United States regarding the Jewish Communities, and how to help them. Why don't you attend and plead your case? Ask them what they intended the money to be used for." My father looked at him incredulously, "don't you realize that not even the trains are working? How am I supposed to get to America?" Amazingly enough, the Government Representative arranged for diplomatic passports for my parents and myself to leave immediately to the States.



The author's parents, Margit and Rabbi Eugene Abraham, with their son Elimelech

On our way to the ship that would take us to America, we passed through the German town where the Klausenberger Rebbe was at the time. Hearing about my experience as a teacher, he asked my father to let me stay for a few months longer and teach the girls. "Four months," he said, "then she will join you." Well, it turned out to be four years until I met my family again, on this side of the ocean.

I recently found a document that was given to my Father by the Kehilla of Turda, Romania, in April 1945. It acknowledges what the Abraham family did during the war. Below is the translation from the original Romanian language. Being that my father was the editor of the Jewish newspaper, "HoEmes" ("The Truth"), he was accustomed to documenting everything. Thus this document was very important to him and to our family.

The Orthodox Community of Turda (Romania)

*No. 53/945
April 10, 1945*

Acknowledgment

It is to be certified by us that during the entire time the Jews were under the rule of Antenescu (allied to Germany), Rabbi Eugene Abraham of Turda engaged in these activities, among others, to help our fellow Jews:

1. In the year 1941, when the Jews of the rural communities were evacuated and interned in the "lager" (camp, formerly an alabaster factory), for approximately four weeks, until the com-

munity installed a kitchen, Mrs. Abraham supplied cooked food for 50-100 persons daily.

2. In March 1942, on their own initiative they organized a plan to feed the poor and orphaned children of the locality: they distributed a cup of milk and bread and marmalade. Between 40-60 children participated daily until September 1944 (at which time war broke out between Hungary and Romania and the Jews ran for their lives). Later the Jewish community participated (by paying for the milk and bread). The production, preparation, and distribution of the food was done the entire time by the family of Mr. Abraham in their own home, disregarding the amount of work, fatigue, time, or contribution of their own supplies.

3. During vacation from school, the above mentioned Mr. Abraham's daughter, Sara, spent her time teaching and entertaining the poor children (of the community) absolutely voluntarily and gratis.

4. Between the months of April and August 1944, when refugees from northern Ardeal (Siebenburger) and Hungary sought shelter (in Romania), Rabbi Abraham disregarded the danger to him and his family involved in hiding the refugees in their meager home.

Signed by the President
A. Schwartz

Secretary
A. Finkelstein

This is the legacy of my parents, and their personal sacrifice on behalf of their brethren. I hope that it is passed on as an example to our children and anyone who wishes to learn from their actions. As their daughter, I certainly feel the great impact they have made on Jewish history.

SHEINDEL SUSSMAN



Sheindel Sussman, née Trebitsch, was born in 1930 in Subotica, Yugoslavia.

In 1950 she came to the U.S, where she was a rebbetzin for many years. Reading and writing are her particular interests, and she loves nature, sports and animals.

Mrs. Sussman has five children, twenty-eight grandchildren, and — *keynahora* — “many” great-grandchildren.

She lives with her husband in Boro Park.

SHEINDEL SUSSMAN

The Land of Milk and Honey

I prayed for many years to be able to be in our beloved land of Israel... My first visit to Israel was in the year of 1982. I was very excited and emotional when my husband David brought me there. When we landed, I was so full of emotion that I almost kissed the earth of the Holy Land.

The first ones to meet us were our *mechutonim*, the Goldmans, who were very nice people. Then we went to our daughter's Osnath's house where she awaited us with a delicious supper. After our happy reunion she took us to our furnished room, which she had rented for us in Bayit Vegan. It was a beautiful neighborhood.

The next day we went to Kiryat Tzanz in Natanyah, where my darling father-in-law lived. It was a difficult trip since it took us two hours and three busses to get there from Yerushalayim. When we arrived he was sleeping, but when he awoke and saw us, he was so happy that the whole trip was worth it! He was a very nice man who was a *tzaddik*. Every day he would say the whole *Tehillim* by heart. After this trip we went every year to see him, but the next time we rented an apartment in Kiryat Tzanz so that we could visit him more often. I liked him very much and it was so nice to have a father-in-law who was such a special man. He always used to *bentch* me.

In Israel we took the opportunity to go touring to many places. We went to Golan T'verya, Tzfas, Bersheva, Yericho, the Kinneret, and the waterfall Baniyas. I loved every minute of it! I also went swimming in the ocean in Kiryat Tzanz. The women there are very *tzniusdik* and they only swam in model coats. And of course we did not want to miss out on *davening* by the *kivve tzaddikim*, so we visited many such *k'vorim*, all over the country.

After my father-in-law passed away, we only went to Israel for *simchos*. The last time we were in Israel was five years ago, when our daughter Osnath married off her youngest son Ephraim, who was in the army. The *aufruf* was in a hotel and many of his friends from the army were there. The *chasuna* was also very lovely. His friends sang beautifully and made it very *lebedik*. It took place in Binyan Ha'Ouma.

We also went a few times to the *Kosel*. I brought all of my saved *tzedakah* money so that I could distribute it to the poor. One elderly woman was very greedy. She bothered



The author in Meiron, Israel, in 1982

me. She wanted all my money! This old lady did not let me go. A Sephardic lady came to my rescue who told her that “enough is enough – leave her alone!” I was very grateful. We really enjoyed walking and shopping in Meah She’arim in Yerushalayim. We were amazed that on such narrow streets there were so many shops, people and tourists! It seemed like a miracle that even busses and cars managed to squeeze through!

Once we had a frightening experience on our tour bus. While we were traveling, we were suddenly stopped by Israeli soldiers. There were rumors that some terrorists were hiding in the neighborhood, so the soldiers closed down all the roads so that no cars or busses were allowed to come in or go out. So, we were left stranded in the middle of the street for two hours! It was amazing that in a matter of minutes we were surrounded by hundreds of Palestinian youths! It was very scary!

Time to say goodbye to my beloved land Israel – I’d like to wish you many good and peaceful years!

PESSY WEISS



Pessy (Paula) Weiss, née Rosenberg, was born in 1932 in Püspökladány, Hungary.

A pre-school teacher, she came to the US in 1956, where she got a GED, and finished as the valedictorian of her class. She volunteers at a nursing home, and has thirty years of dancing under her belt.

Mrs. Weiss has four children, twenty-three grandchildren, and thirteen great-grandchildren. She lives in Williamsburg.

PESSY WEISS

Events from My Childhood

Until April 1944, we were a big and happy family consisting of my parents, five brothers and two sisters. My father was the rabbi of our town, Kaba, in Hungary. My mother, who was born in Czechoslovakia, was the daughter of a rabbi. I remember we had a big backyard with chickens and geese. Every morning, we collected fresh eggs from the chicken coop. My mother baked bread twice a week to feed her hungry children.

I will never forget those beautiful Friday nights! When my father came home from *shul* he *bentched* all of us. We kissed his hand and said Gut Shabbos. I can still recall the aroma of the incredibly delicious gefilte fish which my mother cooked.

When the Germans entered our town, we were forced to wear yellow stars. The Germans summoned my father to forced labor. He had to shave his beard. One night, he said goodbye to us. We never dreamed that it would be the last time we would see him.

One day, we were told to pack our belongings. Within an hour, we had to leave. They took us to Nadudvar, to the ghetto, by horse and buggy. Nadudvar was a small town about two hours away. My oldest sister Rivchu was very smart. She browned some chicken fat with flour, an *einbren*. She placed it in a large jug. This kept us going. Each of us got a spoonful every day. They put us in one small room. After four weeks, they took us to a brick factory in Debrecen. It had no roof. When it rained, everything got wet, even our precious bread. After a few days, they said that all large families were to be taken to the railroad station, where the cattle cars were waiting. About one hundred people were squeezed into a car with no food, windows, or bathroom. We traveled for three days. The train stopped and then started going back. We were so happy! We thought we were going back; but they took us to Strasshof, in Austria. We arrived after one week.

Upon arrival, we went through a "disinfection" process in the showers. We had to remove all our clothes, and we were terribly embarrassed. They asked for volunteers for work. My older sister said that our two older brothers should go; maybe that would ensure their survival. They were not pleased. As they were leaving, my brother Yitzchak shouted angrily, "I'll never forget this." My mother was constantly crying that we would die and my father would survive.

Then the Germans took three families, including ours, to a farm. We slept in greenhouses on straw. My mother went to work during the day. I and my four younger siblings stayed alone. There were frequent bombings all the time. The entire sky would light up at night. It was frightening.

After a month, they took us to an industrial city, Mausbirbaum. Everyone was in one large barrack. There were many air raids. We were constantly running into the bomb shelters, nights and days.



The author at the age of five, together with her father and younger brother Shaya

My mother was very sad that her two older sons were not with her. Every day, she went to the Lagerführerin and begged her to find the whereabouts of her children. One day, a big truck arrived. Whom did we see? Our two brothers had come back! A miracle had happened. The Lagerführerin had a good heart; she had listened to my mother's cries. (My brothers were not very happy to have returned to us; living conditions here were horrible, compared to where they had been.)

One day, there was a big air raid. I was home with my four younger siblings. The Lager gate was open. We started running, together with three of the neighbor's children. We had no idea where we were going. There were barrels with white vapor coming out. We couldn't see anything. We just kept on walking. We were scared. We saw a barn and ran inside for shelter. Everything was shaking; we cried bitterly. Fi-

nally, it was quiet. The owner of the barn came in and saw us. He took pity on us. "Unschuldige Kinder" ("innocent children"), he said, and took us into his house. He cooked *lokshen* and cheese for us. We were scared to go back. We were worried that something had happened to our mother. Suddenly, a miracle happened. My brother Yitzchak appeared and took us back.

In January, we were transported to a different Lager. Each barracks housed ten people. An old man, Mr. Weiss, joined us. He learned every day with my two older brothers. There, I was able to sneak out of the camp. The place was enclosed by barbed wire, but I found a small opening. I sneaked out together with Moishie Silber. We went begging for food. In the Lager, we were each given one small piece of bread, and nothing else. We were always hungry. My mother spoke German, so I was able to say, "bitte, ein Stückchen Brot" ("please, a little piece of bread"). The Austrians gave us some bread, which I took back and shared with my siblings.

I noticed that a truck would come to deliver vegetables to the kitchen. I quickly ran and picked up what had fallen off the truck, and hid it under the bed. We still had one pot. I made a fire, placing two bricks parallel to each other and collected some wood and paper. I put the vegetables in the pot and added water and I cooked a good soup. All the people who stayed in the barracks because they didn't work came to me, and I gave each person a spoonful. Mr. Weiss truly enjoyed it. My mother always made sure he shouldn't be hungry.

I always saved and hid some of my bread rations, thinking that there might be a time when we wouldn't have any. My brother Shaya always cried that he was hungry. Anyuka asked me, "Pessele, give him a little." It was a bitter cold winter. One day, I went with my brother to collect some coal for the oven in our barracks. We went to the railroad station. Suddenly, an SS man came and smacked my brother and said, "*Nimm deine Mütze herunter!*" ("Take off your cap!"). We were afraid he would kill us. But he gave us some bread and told us to come back again. We ran home and never went there again.

In 1945, when the Germans knew that they were losing the war, they wanted to take us to Theresienstadt, where the infamous crematoria were. Again, they told us to get into the cattle cars. As we were boarding the car, the SS suddenly said, "*Heraus* – out of here; get in the other car!" That was a great *nes*, because suddenly there was an air raid siren. All the railroad tracks were bombed and our train was hit. Three people died in the next car, the one we had been in at first! The rest of us survived. My mother went into a state of shock. The Germans unlocked our car and took us back to the Lager. Two weeks later, the Russians came and liberated us. The Russian soldiers wanted to take my mother to work. We all gathered around her and cried, and we didn't let them take her.



The author's mother and baby brother Yossi

We wanted to go back home to Kaba to meet our father. It took us weeks by foot. There were no trains. We found a horse and cart, and all the kids climbed onto it. We arrived in Pressburg, and we all got lice and became sick. After one week, we got on a train to Hungary. We finally arrived, hopeful that we would reunite with our dear father. We were told the bad news that, in October 1944, sixty Jews had been hiding in a shelter. The Germans had slaughtered them all. Our father was among them. This was in Apofa, near Debrecen. He was only forty-six years old when he was murdered by the Nazis, and left behind a family of nine. These martyrs are buried in a special area in the Debrecen Cemetery. We also learned that most of our family did not survive. My father had two brothers with large families. My mother had nine siblings; only one sister survived. My mother weighed only ninety pounds; we were all skin and bones. We had no house, no money, and no food. None of our belongings were ever found. It was a miracle that we all survived, Baruch Hashem, with G-d's help. I cannot believe that we actually went through this horror and survived this tragedy. Hashem helped us survive.

My husband, Shlomo Zalmen Hachohen Weiss, ztz"l, was a very special person, a true *tzaddik*. He lost more than we can ever imagine, but he was never bitter about what had happened. His parents and nine siblings were murdered in Auschwitz. He was mercilessly tortured and endured indescribable atrocities for one and a half years in a labor camp.

We both miraculously survived and were *zoche* to build our beautiful family that all follow *b'derech haTorah*. I always thank Hashem for all His goodness and kindness.

SYLVIA WEISS



Sylvia (Cipora) Weiss, née Aszknazy, was born in 1923 in Reteg, Romania.

She came to the US in 1948. She has spent many years volunteering for Bikur Cholim of Flatbush, even—or particularly—after her retirement.

Mrs. Weiss has three children, “many” grandchildren, and—*keynahora*—a “dozen plus” great-grandchildren.

She lives in Flatbush.

SYLVIA WEISS

Coming to America (As told to her daughter Shoshana Kruger)

Life is precious. I learned that lesson in 1945, when I was liberated from the evil regime of the Nazis, *yemach shemam*. I had lost my parents and sisters, yet the *nissim* that kept me alive during the war did not cease after having survived Auschwitz. I witnessed miracle after miracle, including finding my brother, Lipi, the only surviving member of my immediate family. The two of us spent seven months in Romania. Our focus was on finding a way to get to Palestine (Israel), to fulfill my father's last wish as he was led to the gas chamber. We were advised to return to Germany where we would be placed in a DP camp, and there we would register our names on a list in order to immigrate to Palestine. The British had been making it very difficult for Jews to immigrate to Palestine, and for two years we waited unsuccessfully for passports to our homeland. Finally, someone advised us to try to go to America from where it might be easier to make the journey to Palestine.

The DP camp that we were in was near Munich. We were fortunate to be sponsored by Mrs. Irene Geller, the mother of the US army chaplain who liberated me. She had sent affidavit papers to the American consulate in Munich. These papers filled us with hope that my brother and I would actually be able to sail to America. There were rumors that the Munich consulate was filled with anti-Semites so we decided to go to Frankfurt-am-Main instead, where the consulate was more sympathetic to Jews. We filled out the forms, but were informed that if we only had relatives in America, the process would go even quicker. My father had mentioned that he had cousins in America, but we did not know their names and had no idea how to locate them.

One of my friends, Judy, who was also related to me, had arrived in America a year before. She was living in Boro Park. One Shabbos, at the Young Israel, Judy met an American girl named Tzippi Englard, who had invited her to come over after the Shabbos program to meet her family. Tzippi's mother asked many questions about Judy's background. When Judy mentioned that she came from Bectlan, the mother got very excited because she knew that she had cousins in that town. She asked Judy, "Do you know the Aszknazy family?" Judy answered eagerly that she certainly did know the family but that only two of them, a brother and sister, had survived the war and were in Germany right now, trying to get to America.

A few days later I received a letter in Hungarian from Tzippi's mother, Helenka. She introduced herself as a cousin of my father's. She sent us \$2, which was worth 480 Marks in Germany, a huge amount of money then. After everything we had been through, it felt so comforting to know that someone was there for us. More importantly, we realized that Hashem was orchestrating our swift departure from this country. This letter was the proof that we so desperately sought. We immediately took Helenka's letter to the consulate. The person in charge who knew us was on vacation, so I explained to those who were covering for him that we finally had the document that could hasten our departure to America. He found our previously filed papers and attached this crucial letter. For the next few months, Helenka continued to keep in touch with us and to send us the money that enabled us to survive.

Weeks later, we were summoned to the quarantine where we were checked for any health problems before we could be allowed to leave for America. We remained there for three weeks un-

til we were given a clean bill of health.

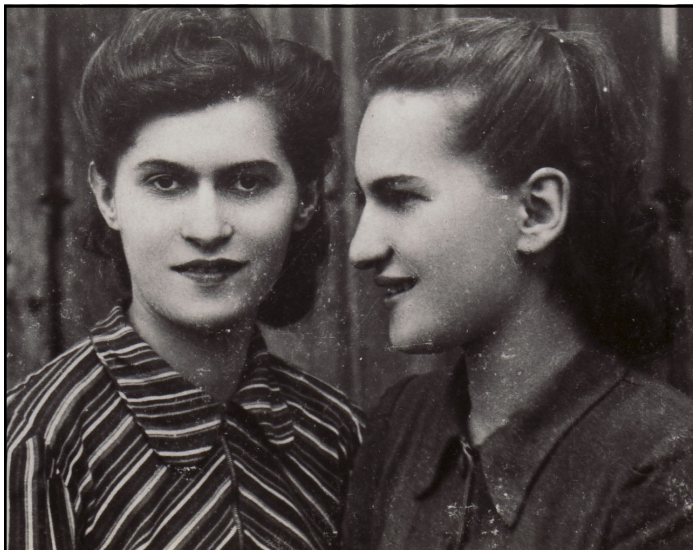
In March 1948, my brother and I optimistically set sail on the SS Jumper with 900 other hopeful refugees. We watched Germany's borders disappear from our sight as we headed toward the Land of America. The ship was small and could not comfortably accommodate the 900 passengers. It was a very rocky ride and many became seasick. Since I was feeling well, I helped a young mother who was ill, by taking care of her baby.



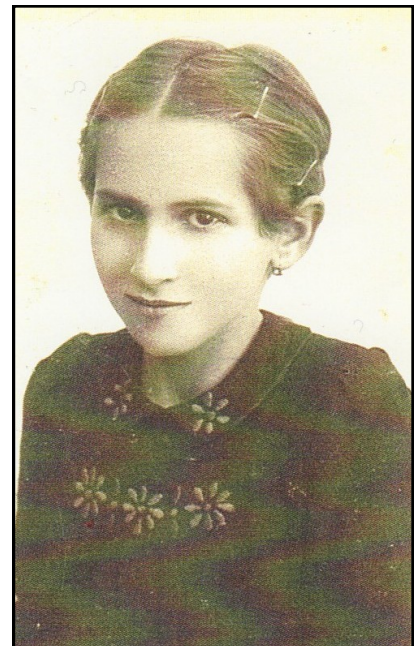
The author's parents, Rose (Née Edelheid) and Yoel Yitzchak Aszknazy

Five days into the trip, we heard our names being called over the loudspeaker. My brother and I panicked; perhaps they had found a reason to send us back to Germany. I told my brother that if that happened, I would jump off the ship into the ocean. I was not going to return to Germany at any cost. Our names were continuously called all day so finally, filled with dread, we went into the captain's office to learn our fate. He handed us a telegram. It was sent from Helenka, who simply wanted to assure us that she would be waiting for us at the hotel designated for the ship's passengers. We were so grateful to Hashem for allowing us to continue the trip without the anxiety of anticipating the worst.

We arrived at night in the New York harbor, but we were not allowed to embark from the ship until morning. We were given permission, however, to go up on the top deck where we were welcomed by the Statue of Liberty, and where we could see the lights of New York and the glimmer of a new future. The happiness and joy we felt was indescribable. But then I started crying, because I realized that I had no idea what was waiting for me on this side of the world.



*The author (profile) with her older sister Sarah Rivka
Younger sister Chaya*





Cousin Helenka in 1950

In the morning we were all allowed off the boat. American relatives embraced, and cried with, their European relatives who had survived the horrors of the war. I cried along with all of them so much that by the time I would actually meet Helenka, there would be no tears left to shed. I was anxious to start this new journey in life.

We were transported by bus to Manhattan, to a hotel on 103rd Street. I had sent Helenka a picture of myself and she was trying to find me. As I came off the bus, I noticed a woman scanning the crowd. Although I had never seen my American cousin, I instinctively knew that this woman was Helenka.

We arrived to the hotel at noon and lunch was served. Our belongings were deposited in a room. Helenka then took my brother and me to Boro Park to meet the rest of the family. Family! The sound of that word was calming and encouraging and filled us with so much hope.

We were introduced to the other cousins who had come over to meet us. Helenka had two brothers, Jack and Moshe, living in America. Jack was married to a young lady, Irene, who had come from Hungary before the war. Irene's brother had fought in the war and had already returned from England, where he had been stationed for three and a half years. He was very handsome and nice.

The next morning, everyone went off to work or to school, and my brother and I were left alone in the house. It was lonely and uncomfortable so we decided to return to Manhattan to see our friends, whom we had left at the hotel. Armed with directions how to travel on the trains, we ventured back to the hotel. We remained for a few days in the hotel, traveling back and forth to Boro Park. By the end of the week, New York was so overflowing with refugees that the authorities in charge of new immigrants informed us that we could no longer remain in the hotel. They were willing to sponsor us to go to Cleveland, Ohio. When we told Helenka that we were leaving for Cleveland, I began to cry. I had finally found family and now I had to say goodbye. Helenka understood my grief and invited us to stay with her. Tzippi volunteered to share her bed with me until a new one could be purchased. My brother slept on the porch.

We stayed in Helenka's house and became genuine members of the family. She was a gracious host. Her children were not jealous of us and welcomed us wholeheartedly. We were treated with so much compassion. Every one of our needs was taken care of. Tzippi was so nice to us that she would put candy bars in our pockets when we weren't looking. It was such a nice surprise and made us feel like we weren't intruding in their lives. I don't know if I ever thanked Helenka and her family for all they did for me, but I know I will never forget the loving kindness they bestowed upon us.

We began to look for employment. Since I knew how to sew, I found a job in a men's clothing factory. My task was to sew collars by hand and the work was back-breaking. Each evening Helenka would calm me and massage my back to ease the tension. Helenka and her husband had a men's tie store and taught my brother Lipi the tie trade. Later he was able to secure a job with the Union. Eventually he bought his own tie factory and had *parnossa* all his life from this.

Weeks later I found a job on Madison Avenue, where I enjoyed sewing elegant women's gowns. I worked there about three months and saved my money. I wanted to buy myself new clothes for the summer. One day Tzippi and I started out on a shopping spree. When we arrived at the train station, I realized that I had left my wallet at home. We decided that I would go back to the house to get my money and meet Tzippi later in Manhattan. I returned quickly to the house to retrieve my wallet so that I could catch the next train. I was pleasantly surprised to see that Irene's brother, Frank, was visiting. I had lost weight since he had last seen me, and right then and there he asked me out on a date. Frank took me to Radio City and we soon became good friends. Every Sunday he would take me out to lunch. I turned to him for advice and I told him all about my other dates. This friendship continued until Labor Day.

One Sunday in September 1948, Frank told me he wanted to take me out to dinner. At dinner he told me about a conversation that he and his mother had while visiting in Cleveland. His mother knew about me from Frank's sister, Irene. She had asked Frank if he was serious about our relationship. His mother reminded him that I was an orphan, and that I would probably want to get married and start my own family. His mother also mentioned that she and his father knew my family tree and that they would be happy to give Frank their blessing to marry me. Without skipping a beat, Frank continued to talk to me about looking for an apartment so that we could schedule a wedding date. I was in shock! I realized afterward that this was probably the first and only marriage proposal ever made by a mother-in-law.



The happy couple, in 1948

On Thursday night after work, Frank surprised me by giving me a beautiful gold watch with diamonds on top. This made our engagement official. We started to look for an apartment, which was hard to find in those days. Frank had a friend who lived in a basement apartment in Boro Park. He was planning to move out, but never told the landlady. Instead he asked us if we were interested. We were, and once that was settled, we started making prepara-

tions for the wedding.

The wedding was scheduled for Sunday, December 5th, 1948. It was to be a small affair in a *shul*. Helenka's older daughter had recently gotten married. She was so happy to let me wear her gown and veil. Having no parents to walk me down to the *chuppah*, Helenka once again stepped up to the plate. She and Frank's mother walked me down the aisle. It was a bittersweet moment amidst a very emotional day. After the ceremony, my brother Lipi hugged me and cried with me tears of sorrow, mixed with wonderful tears of joy.

My new married life began. I had a new job on Seventh Avenue in a coat factory. I worked there until my first child, a boy, was born a year later. It was a happy life filled with ups and downs, health and sickness, good times and sad times, and it lasted for fifty-five years, until my husband was *niftar* in January 2004. I am thankful to Hashem for selecting me to live and for the privilege of sharing my story with my family. The miracles that accompanied me throughout my life are now reflected

in my children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, who continue the legacy of the *kedoshim* who perished under the cruel reign of Hitler, *yemach shemo*. I hope that my parents are proud of my achievements and are *sheeping nachas* in *shomayim*.



Getting ready for Shabbos in the basement apartment

AFTERWORD

Club Nissim – A Lesson in Faith

Club Nissim was so named by its members in recognition of their miraculous survival. Each man and woman in the club is a living miracle, and this is what unites an otherwise diverse group of participants. It is Club Nissim's job to add more joy to the golden years of its members; they come here, not to bemoan the past, but to enjoy the present. They come to widen their intellectual horizons, to nourish their spiritual selves, and to cultivate friendships and an active social life. To wit, laughter and fun are high on the agenda! They may share painful life experiences, but they come trooping to Club Nissim in rain or shine, snowstorm or heat wave, looking forward to sharing good times with each other.

We who are privileged to work with this extraordinary group are constantly awed: To have endured such horrors, such loss, and such pain – and yet to be able to live a productive life; to be able to laugh and love; to keep faith with Hashem – this is the true miracle! Club Nissim's members continually demonstrate what it means to be a Jew – to recognize G-d's hand in every instance, to realize that He has a plan for the world, and to trust in this reality even when walking through “the valley of the shadow of death.” We all need to learn from our Survivors' strength and faith. They have a lesson to teach us and future generations.

“If Hashem allowed me to survive this ordeal, it means that he is there, and that there is a purpose to my existence,” is a sentiment frequently expressed by our members. They see life as a series of personal choices – the choice to focus on the good and the positive, no matter what. *Gam zu l'tovah*, this too is for good, is an ancient Jewish adage, meant to strengthen a person's *emunah* and *bitachon*, even in the face of tragic events. The Holocaust Survivors of Club Nissim are living examples of the daily application of this wisdom.

These Holocaust Survivors may well be the greatest spiritual teachers of our era, and if we are willing to listen and learn, we will reap the rich benefits of their message.

Simonne Hirschhorn

Program Director, Club Nissim

GLOSSARY

A”H	“Alav/Aleha Hasholom” – see below
Alav hasholom	May he rest in peace
Aleha hasholom	May she rest in peace
Alter heim	The old home; back in Europe
Aufruf	A groom’s call to the Torah reading on the Shabbos before his wedding
B”H	“Baruch Hashem” – see below
Balbatish	“Suitable for a property owner”; genteel, proper, dignified
Balebosteh	Mistress of the house; particularly a skilled, proficient one
Baruch Hashem	(or Boruch Hashem) Blessed/praised be G-d
B’derech haTorah	On the path of the Torah
Bentch	Bless
Bikur Cholim	(The institution of) Visiting the sick
Bitachon	Trust [in G-d]
Bli ayin hora	See: keynahora
B’simcha	With joy
Cholov Yisroel	Milk guarded by a Torah-observant Jew from the moment of milking
Chasunah	Wedding
Cheder	Jewish elementary school
Chesed	Lovingkindness
Chometz	Leaven; prohibited food during Passover
Chuppah	Wedding canopy
Daven, davening	Pray, praying
Emunah	Faith
Eretz Yisroel	The Land of Israel
Ess gezunterheit!	Eat in good health!
Farfel	Type of noodle dish
Frum	Pious, strictly observant
Gehinnom	Gehenna; hell
Hamantaschen	Triangular, jam-filled pastry, eaten on Purim
Hashem	“The Name”; [referring to the holy name of] G-d
Judenrein	Cleansed of Jews
Kapo	Camp prisoners who worked for the SS as supervisors (over fellow prisoners), known for their brutality and ruthlessness

Kasher, kashering	To make kosher
Kedoshim	Holy ones (refers to martyrs)
Kehilla	Congregation, community
Keynahora	No Evil Eye [should befall him/her/them]!
Kivrei Tzaddikim	Graves of <i>tzaddikim</i>
Kneidel	Dumpling
Kosel [Hama'aravi]	The [Western] Wall
K'vorim	Graves
Lagerführerin	Camp Supervisor (female)
Lebedik	Lively
Lecht	Light; candle
Levaya	Funeral
Lokshen	Noodles
Mechutonim	In-laws; specifically the parents of your child's spouse
Mesorah	Tradition
Mikvah	Ritual bath, used monthly by married women; by converts; and by some men on a daily or weekly basis
Minyan	Group of ten adult Jewish males needed to hold public services
Mishloach Manos	Food portions sent out among friends on Purim
Mitzvos	Divine commandments
Nachas	Spiritual joy; particularly the joy parents derive from their children's spiritual achievements
Nebech	Poor, miserable; often used as expression of commiseration
Nes	Miracle
Niftar	Released [from the yoke of the commandments]; deceased
Nissim	Miracles
Parnossa	Livelihood , income
Reb	Sir, Mister; honorific used with first name
Rebbe	Rabbinic leader of a Chasidic sect; also a rabbinical teacher
Rebbetzin	Wife of a Rabbi or Rebbe
Ribono shel olom	Ruler of the Universe; G-d
Sandek	The man given the honor of holding the infant at the circumcision
Se'udah	Meal; particularly a festive one

Shaliach	Messenger; agent
Shavuot	Feast of Weeks, celebrating the revelation at Mount Sinai and the giving of the Torah (in late spring)
Shecht	To slaughter in accordance with Jewish law
Shochet	Jewish slaughterer
Shema Yisroel	“Hear Israel!”; Jewish declaration of faith (To be said before moment of death)
Shepping nachas	Deriving, gathering <i>nachas</i> (see: <i>nachas</i>)
Shofar	Ram’s horn, blown during Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year
Shomayim	Heaven
Shomer Shabbos	“Keeping Shabbos”; concept indicative of a person’s overall commitment to Torah law
Shul	Orthodox synagogue
Shvester	Sister
Simchos	Joyous occasions, particularly lifecycle events
Sukkah	The booth erected for 8 days in observance of the Feast of Booths
Taleisim	Prayer shawls (singular: Tallis)
Talmid(ei) Chachom(im)	Wise Disciple(s); person very advanced in Torah learning
Tehillim	Psalms of King David
To be <i>zoche</i>	To merit, be deserving [of good fortune]
Tzaddik	Righteous, holy man
Tzadekes	Righteous, holy woman
Tzedakah	Charity
Tzniusdik	Modest
Vidui	Confession of sins (To be said before the moment of death)
Yemach Shemo (Shemam)	May his (their) name(s) be obliterated
Yetzer Hara	The Evil Inclination—the inner urge that draws us towards sinful, negative or destructive behavior
Yiddishkeit	Judaism, Jewishness; more specifically the adherence to Jewish law, custom and morality
Yiras Shomayim	Fear of Heaven
Zoche	See: “To be <i>zoche</i> ”