



ROZHISHCHERS ALL OVER THE WORLD

Rozhishchers Today

Today, Rozhishchers are dispersed throughout the entire world. In Israel they number 250 families (and taking into consideration those who had immigrated to the country as children and those who, were born in the country — their number reaches nearly a thousand).

We do not possess accurate figures for other countries, but we do know that there is a large group in the United States, including the many who immigrated there at the start of the century as a result of the pogroms, and those who arrived there before the Second World War or after it. In Brazil there are about thirty families, about 15 in Canada, and in Argentina there are some five families. Isolated families live in other parts of the world: the Flash family in London, Avenchiks in Paris, the Bortnik family in Torino, Italy and the Katzan's in Portugal.

Good connections are maintained between the society in Israel and Rozhishchers across the sea. It is as though we were all one family. Overseas friends visit us at Beth Rozhishch (Rozhishch House), where we enjoy holding social gatherings in their honour, and many maintain close contact with us through letters. They have inscribed their loved ones on our Memorial Scroll and many have written articles for this book.

It is the Israel association and our Beth Rozhishch which form the centre uniting Rozhishchers who are dispersed all over the world.

The twentieth century was for the Jews of eastern Europe, a century of dispersement. Many Rozhishch families broke up, some leaving for America and other places in the New World at the beginning of the century because of the pogroms; others leaving after the First World War because of the bad economic situation; the majority was to perish in the Hell of Hitler's Europe, and the few survivors managed to immigrate to the Americas or to make aliya to Israel. The following are stories typical of families, who experienced this process, but who still maintain the tradition of great social concern which typified eastern European Jewry.



THE SAGA OF THE PEPPERS

by Avner Rachmieli

Because of the bad economic situation in Rozhishch after the end of the First World War, my mother decided to return with us, her seven small children, to her native village of Omelno, where we lived for some three years.

Omelno was a typical Ukrainian village about twenty-five kilometers from Rozhishch, and there were two other Jewish families living there. These were my uncle (my mother's brother) Sander Feffer with his wife and his daughter, Genia, and my uncle David Blak (Block), his wife Haya-Sarah (nee Feffer, my mother's sister) and his five sons.

In my earlier childhood I had heard stories of the "golden" era of the Feffer and Blak families before the First World War. These had intermarried and formed a many-branched dynasty, which in the course of time was to disperse over the entire world. Now their descendants live in the United States, in Israel and in Brazil.

The family conducted the local affairs of the large local landowner, Nossenko, who spent most of his time in large centres. They managed his flour mills, brandy factories, and the woods. They purchased grain, cattle and agricultural products in the village and supplied it with vital commodities brought in from the adjacent towns of Koik, Trochimbrod, Rozhishch and even from more distant localities. Among them were well-established merchants, famous throughout the district, learned religious scholars, very strictly observant men, and there were also among them those who scarcely managed to make ends meet.

Three Pfeffer brothers, Itzhak (Itzik), Motel and Max (Michael) immigrated to the United States prior to the First World War. They settled in Denver, Colorado and in Salt Lake City, Utah, and laid the foundations of a young, successful and dynamic branch of the family.

To this day, the Peppers make up a considerable portion of the Salt Lake City Jewish community and are active both in public and economic life.

Max (Michael) and his children, as well as the family of the late Itzik live in Denver and their families, too, have branched out and multiplied, and now live in many parts of the country where they have achieved prominence in many fields of endeavour and in Jewish community life.

These three brothers became the foundation of strength for those members of the family remaining in Poland, and supported them in times of distress. In 1922 they were joined in the United States by my sister, Miriam, and my brother Michael (Milton) Sherman, their niece and nephew, and in 1939, just before the outbreak of the Second World War, they miraculously managed to bring their sister, my mother, Gitel (Shkurnik) Sherman to them.

Mother lived to a ripe old age in the United States. Only her brother Sander remained in Poland, to be killed by the Nazis.

My immediate family has been dispersed throughout the entire world. My father, who died at an early age at the end of the First World War, left my mother with seven small children to raise. Mother, as mentioned above, my oldest sister Miriam and my brother Milton came to the United States; my brothers the late Shlomo, Moshe and Motel to Brazil; and my sister Ziporah and myself to Israel.

Village Way Of Life

When we arrived in the village, the landowner was no longer there. His lands had been divided among hundreds of peasants, and the rest of his property was being temporarily managed by the Russian administrator.

We lived in the pleasant house of my mother's uncle, Motel Block, whose household had meanwhile left the vicinity which had remained practically untouched by the war. It was a spacious home, conspicuous among the low peasant houses. What I remember best about this period was the scenery around the house, the countryside of Volhynia; the endless fields of wheat, rye, buckwheat and other cereals growing as tall as a man. The meadows for grazing and for fodder. The forest which began a few yards away from the house.



The three brothers Pepper: Isaac, Motel and Michael-Max and their families: immigrated to the United States from the village of Omelno, near Rozhishch before the First World War and made their homes in Salt Lake City, Utah, and Denver, Colorado.

Gertie Sherman (Shkurnik), née Pepper, at the Bar Mitzvah of her great-grandson, Hershey Rothbart, May, 1966. Shown in the picture are her daughter, Miriam, and her son, Michael, of Denver, Col., and their families, and her son, Motel Shkurnik of Brazil.



As a small boy, I loved the tranquil scenery of the village; the peasant who ploughed with horses or cows; the shepherdess who came every morning to fetch our brown cow and add it to her herd, and who returned it in the evening together with a large bowl of berries which she had picked in the woods while watching the cows; the wagons harnessed to horses or a team of bulls.

Once my brother and I discovered a "treasure" of mushrooms in the woods near our house. We took off our shirts, and carried the mushrooms home in them. Mother made a wonderful mushroom soup with them, even giving some of it to the aunts and the neighbours. Near our house there was an abandoned ruin which had once been the landowner's luxurious castle. In the front of it there was a beautiful garden, with roses and other wonderful flowers growing there as well as beautiful spreading chesnut trees. Behind it, a fruit tree garden, planted in avenues, obviously the work of a landscape architect. This garden particularly attracted me. There were juicy apples of all kinds in it, large "bell" pears, wonderful tiny berries, and straight avenues of tall, decorative trees amongst which the landowner had at one time gone riding. The keeper of the garden spent most of his time sitting in his hut, weaving the shoes which most of the peasants wore, out of willow bark (posteles).

My uncle David used to lease the garden and sell some of its fruits in Kolk or Rozhishch. On Saturdays in the summer, our five cousins would visit us and we would walk in this wonderful garden or lie in the grass in the shade of the trees, enjoying nature and dreaming our dreams of the future.

The peasants led lowly lives. Their houses were low, with straw thatched roofs. Their cultural level was low — they were illiterates. But they were stable. And to us, young Jews, they seemed to be calm, healthy and pleased with their lives, and they awoke in us the longing for the life of a people on its own land. Therefore, when the first hints of the Zionist movement reached the village, they penetrated deep into the hearts of the youths who were looking ahead for something of this sort. We enthused over the idea of "aliya" to Israel.

My oldest sister, Miriam, was the breadwinner in our home. After father's death she took over the task of helping mother and the small children. She would travel to Rozhishch and even to Warsaw to bring back woven cloth and other goods which the peasant women bought in exchange for grain, chickens, eggs and other agricultural products. She was helped by my mother, my oldest brother, Michael, and my sister Faige. We wanted for nothing.

Uncle David's home was large and it was located in the centre of the village on the main road. He was a Hassid, given over to Torah, much prayer and good deeds.

He traded cattle, grain and the like, and also had a general store with goods brought from the city. Behind the house was the stable for the horse. He had a nice carriage as well as a light winter carriage. Beside the stable there was a cowshed where the two or three milk cows which supplied an abundance of milk products were kept. There was often a beef cow there too, which had been purchased to sell at the fairs.

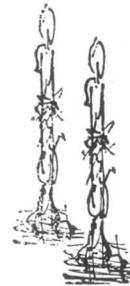
The family's private well which supplied fresh water was in the garden, behind the house. Any passerby who entered Uncle David's house always enjoyed a generous reception there.

My uncle used to go to the fairs in Rozhishch and Kolk to sell cattle and to buy goods for the store. He had the reputation of being fair, straight and a man of his word. Although he was not rich, his home was generously managed. Any Jewish visitor passing through the village, would spend the night at his home. He did not forget us children at Hannukah, and gave us Hannukah "gelt", and on the ordinary days of the year he took an interest in us and made sure that we studied with the teacher (melamed) whom he had brought from Kolk to stay in the village specially to teach us.

He had a Torah in his home, and on Sabbath and holidays, public prayer was held there, with Jews from the adjoining village of Siltzes joining in, as without them there would be no "minian".

Uncle David was a gay man, who loved to study the Holy books and particularly to look for interesting interpretations in them. His five sons grew up in the house. The older ones, Asher, Moshe, and Avraham helping him in the business, while the smaller ones, Jacob and Joseph studied with the melamed brought from neighbouring towns.

Going to the fairs on winter nights, in the cold and the rain, the mud and the snow, was very difficult. A trip of twenty-five



מרדכי רוזנמן הי"ד, בנה של רבקה לבית
 מוטל בליאק מאומלנו, נפל תוך שירותו
 בחיל האוויר ביום 29 ביולי 1954.



Mordechai Rosenman, son of Rivka Block from Omelno, fell while in service with the Israeli Air Force in 29, July, 1954.

kilometers lasted all night. The road was not paved, and the mud was thick. Here and there the road was paved with sections of tree trunks which had been laid by the army during the First World War, and although the cart passing over them did not sink into the mud, it swayed so, that the travellers were made well aware of their "kishkes" (intestines).

My uncle celebrated the festivals in the best Jewish tradition, strictly adhering to all the customs. For Pesach, all the Matzoth for all the Jewish families were baked at his home, and the "Matzah Shmura" was baked with special grains which had been guarded against dampness of any kind throughout the year.

The High Holidays, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, were observed in all their sacredness and awe by this small Jewish community. We, the little children, lived the anxiety of Judgement Day, and when we walked home with mother after the Kol Nidre prayer and a star came out, it seemed as though the sky had parted to receive our prayers. Simchat Torah, on the other hand, was very joyful and gay.

For Uncle David, learning was the most important thing in life, and therefore he encouraged the children to study diligently. He loved to test the children's cleverness and knowledge with all kinds of ingenious quizzes and tests. Once he tested us with this story: You know that it is forbidden to look at the Cohens in the Synagogue. Should a child look at them once, he would be blinded in one eye. Should he look the second time, he would be blinded in the second eye. And what would happen should he look the third time? He would look around the children, waiting for the reply. And when one of the bright ones came out with the answer: How could he look the third time, if he is already blind in both eyes?, Uncle David would praise him generously.

I loved this uncle because he was so generous and loving. He would help members of the family without keeping accounts.

Yehudith Block (Biberman), the first halutza in the family. Studied at the Nahalai Agricultural School, run by Hannah Maizle. She is pictured on a pile of hay at Nahalal in 1922 (left).



Although he was not rich, he was numbered among the givers, and was happy with his lot in life.

He was very attached to his big house, to the style of life of a well off village Jew, to the expansive scenery. His brothers did leave the village. Leibish and Nathan Block moved to Salt Lake City in the United States, Motel to Warsaw, BathSheva and Haim to Lutsk and Raisel to Osova.

His three sons, Avraham, Jacob and Joseph emigrated to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, (where Joseph died in 1975). His oldest son, Asher, moved to Lutsk. Uncle David Block died before the Second World War, as did his wife, Haya-Sarah.

His second son, Moshe who, with his family, obstinately tried to continue the tradition of the glorious generations of the Blocks and the Jews of Omelno, were killed by the Nazis.

Those who survived were his brother Nathan's family in the United States, the families of his three sons in Brazil, his granddaughter, Asher's daughter, Dvorah Haichik and his nephew the son of his sister Bath Sheva, Dr. Sunik Berenblum in Israel, as well as the families of his brother Motel's three daughters Luba, Rivka and Eve, in Israel and the United States.

Yehudith Biberman, the daughter of Motel Blak makes the following family account: My father and my brother Zelik were killed by the Kossacks in 1915. My brothers Avraham and Nathan and my sister, Chasia, were murdered by the Nazis. We three sisters, Gittel, Rivka and myself, and Madhave, my brother Zelik's daughter immigrated to Israel in the twenties and made our home in the small pioneering town that Rehovot was in those days. My sister Chana had emigrated to the United States.



Abe Perlmutter, his wife, and Leah Gavish at Beit Rozhishch.



THE PERLMUTTERS

A family, also typical of those who left Russia before the First World War is the Perlmutter. **Moshe Grabarski** writes about them:

The Perlmutter have settled mostly in Denver, Colorado, and Washington, D.C. They have been active economically and in the Jewish life of the United States. They have in various ways helped many Jewish immigrants who reached the United States empty-handed.

However, the Perlmutter have always had a special feeling for Jewish cultural and business life. They have helped build the Jewish community wherever they have been, through encouraging and supporting synagogues, schools, libraries and other institutions of which the Jewish community is so proud.

They are true pioneers, in the business and economic sense as well as from the Jewish point of view. It is through them and others like them that the Jewish community in America has grown and developed in the way which has given them so crucial an influence on the entire Jewish people.

The first of the Perlmutter to leave Rozhishch for America was Moshe (Morris) in 1907. In 1912, Abe arrived in the States and afterwards all of my uncle Reuben Wolf's family comprising five sons and two daughters. The last to arrive were Pinchas and Beiltze and their children in 1922.

The Perlmutter are particularly interested in Beth Rozhishch and Morris, Abe and Pinchas have visited there, and helped purchase equipment for it. When the late Pinchas visited Israel with his wife, he took an interest in everything around him, and particularly in the man in the street, the worker, the schools and all that was happening in the country.

We hope that the young generation of this wonderful family, and indeed the younger generation, in general, inherits the family tradition and ideology and is as active and as interested in Jewish life as was this founding generation.



SEYMOUR (SENIA) ZUCKERMAN — THE DOVE LOVER

By Sol Miller

In his childhood, Senia Zuckerman took full advantage of the few pleasures life in the town then held for a child. He was not torn by the ideologies of left or of right, but was interested in life as it was.

He lived in the centre of town, in a brick house which had been left standing without doors and windows after the First World War. His mother, Manya, ran the drugstore. He and his brother Volodya were orphaned at an early age. Their father, Shlomo, died soon after the First World War, and their mother on December 11, 1927. His uncle, Shmerl Linder (Zuckerman) also lived in Rozhishch.

Volodya was well-known in the town as a happy-go-lucky fellow. We remember him sailing on a small boat on the Styr, singing and playing the guitar.

Senia was friendly with the best young people of the town and loved by all. In the winter he used to spend many long hours skating on the Styr, or on the Stavok. He was one of the best skaters in town.

But his favourite sport or hobby was doves. He devoted much time and warm love to them, and the doves, in return, were grateful and loyal to him, and they never betrayed him... it was as though they were bound to the bird-house on the roof of his house.

Senia used to walk in the streets holding one dove in his bosom and one in his hand. When he saw Zapolski's (or, for that matter, anyone else's) doves, he used to throw his male or female



The Perlmutter

into the air, and then you could see the doves turning and being drawn directly towards Senia's birdhouse. When he would whistle, his doves understood his signal, and would often bring him strange doves home as prisoners.

The unwritten code of fair play had it that when a dove came into your birdhouse, he was yours. Senia knew the characteristics of the doves well, and knew when to send a "he" out and when a "she" so that their attraction would be stronger.

The children were jealous of his successes and he made a name for himself as a superior dove hunter. He played the game seriously, but always with good humour, sure that "his" birds would always win out.

When Senia came to Tel Aviv for the opening of Beit Rozhishch on March 11, 1961, and took the floor to greet the participants, instead of using words, he let out a whistle with the skill of his youth. Everyone in that crowded hall lifted his eyes, looking for doves over his head... this was the most original greeting of that entire gay evening.

Now Senia lives in Canada with his family. He is successful in his business and is one of the loyal, devoted and active members of the Rozhishch committee in Canada. It was in his home that the Canadian committee was founded in 1957.

Senia has become a serious man, but he still has in him the freshness and love of freedom, nature, simplicity and honesty — those fine characteristics which he brought with him from the old home, and which he will certainly give over to his children.



BOB GELLERSTEIN

By Avner Rachmieli

His father, Reb David Hershel Beinishes, was a quiet dilligent man, known to be a superior craftsman. When anyone wanted a first rate carpenter, they always called on Reb David and his partners. They had made all the furniture for the Trisker Synagogue including its beautiful Holy Ark.

Reb David Gellerstein prayed at the Trisk Hassidic Synagogue and was known to be a Zionist. The Gellerstein family genealogy went back several hundred years to the Rav Yom Tov Lipman Heller who for some time was the Rabbi of Brisk and in 1634—1643 was the Rabbi of Ludmir (Vladimir Volinsk). He wrote the interpretation to the Mishna Tosfot Yom Tov and was known as a Great Talmudic scholar and learned man. Bob relates that he was never permitted to forget this fact. When Reb Eliahu Pfeffer heard his lessons on Saturday afternoons, he always urged him to work hard because he must uphold the honour of his ancestry.

His mother was Rivka bat Moshe who ran the family's grocery store assisted by her two daughters Dvoske and Manke. Bob says that both sisters were a source of help, good advice and counsel to the five younger brothers, even after they married.

As was the case in many Rozhishch families, the Gellerstein children divided their loyalties among all the political parties in Jewish life at that time. They were active in all that went on in town, and you could scarcely walk down the street without meeting one of them.

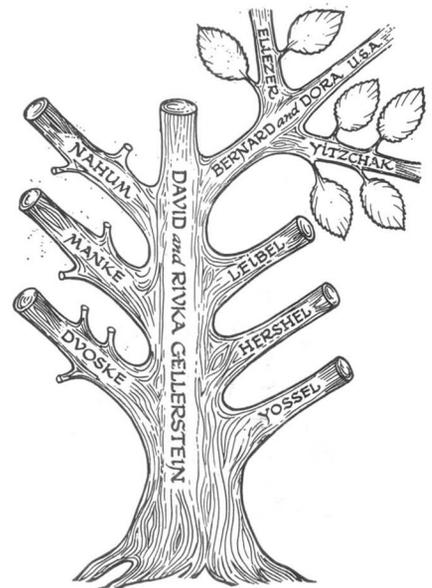
Nachum, the eldest brother, belonged to Brith HeHayal, Berl (Bob) was a member of HeHalutz. Yossel, the third brother belonged to Betar, Hershel to HeHalutz, while the youngest, Leibel'le, the apple of his parents eye, belonged to HaShomer HaZair.

Nachum, was a strong fearless fellow, respected by his younger brothers, who taught them how to defend themselves against Gentile hoodlums.

Berl (Bob) had a sharp mind and excelled in his studies in the Yeshiva under Reb Shlomo Zatz. He later studied for a short period at the Rovno Yeshiva. Afterwards, he became an enthusiastic member of HeHalutz and went to Hachshara at Dombrovitz.

Shoshana Hazan (Zilber) who was at the Dombrovitz Hachshara at the time says that when Berl arrived, the attitude of the Gentile labourers towards the Jews changed altogether. Before they used to bother the Jews who were not used to hard labour and particularly, they used to bother the girls. When Berl arrived they saw that in addition to his brainpower, he also had brawn. They immediately stopped bothering the group.

In the town, too, it was known that the Gellersteins, Nachum and Berl had a strong hand, and although they scarcely used it, the Hehalutz depended on Berl during quarrels, while Betar relied on



One of a family — Bernard Gellerstein arrived in the United States before the war and built his home in New York. His parents, his four brothers and two sisters and their families — were killed by the Nazis.

Nachum. The Gentile hoodlums knew of this too, and it served as a deterrent to them.

The parents taught the children, through their example, to be loyal and close to each other, and despite their different political loyalties, the family was a single close unit, each member always prepared to come to the defence of the rest.

When Bob reached America, it became the dream of his life to bring the rest of his family over to be together with him. Unfortunately, this was not to be. He therefore regards it as his duty to preserve the memory of his parents and brothers and sisters through good works and through supporting others from Rozhishch.

He organized the New York committee, became its chairman, and is now the honorary president. If he hears of any Rozhishcher coming to New York, he treats him as he would a devoted brother. His home has become a kind of shelter for Rozhishchers in the best Jewish tradition of receiving guests.

Fate brought Bob Gellerstein to the banks of the Hudson, not to the banks of the Jordan. But he comes to Israel often, is particularly interested in Beit Rozhishch, being one of its founders, maintains close connection with the committee in Israel and contributes to all its activities.



THEODORE (TEVYE) ROYFFE (TOYENU)

By Sol Miller

Research has indicated that the Royfée family may have its origins traced back to Aharon Ben Joseph HaRofo (1250—1320), an important Karaite scholar and writer. Aharon Ben Joseph Harofe lived most of his life in Constantinople, but spent some time in Solkhat, Krimea. He was the author of much important Karaite literature. (the Hebrew Encyclopedia).

I went around with him in our carefree childhood and in the Yeshiva. He was a good friend, who received beatings from Rebbe Yona, and these were not always because of his hi-jinks, but for the "good deeds" of others, who used to make the Rebbe's life miserable, but he was never a tattletale...

He was a handsome, healthy child who loved to play and run around in the streets. What he was learning in Heder didn't really trouble his head.

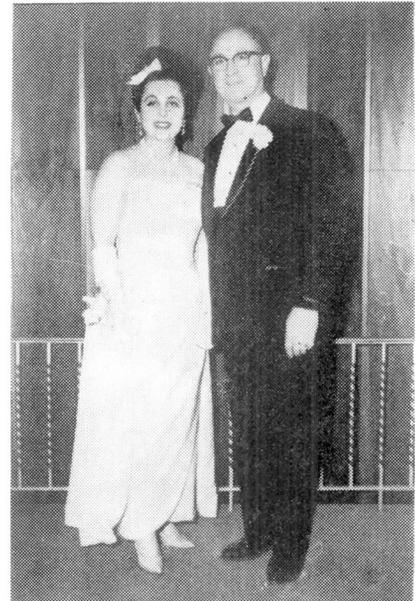
He used to have good ideas that all the pupils liked, but which Rebbe Yona did not. Therefore, the Rebbe called him Toyenu... and when Toyenu and the "bandit'le" (Bunim Melamed) started their tricks, life in the Heder became really fun ..

At the banquet held in Beit Rozhishch in honour of his visit to Israel, Tevya told about once having sat himself on a pig and having ridden it through the street where they lived. The pig screeched, while the children laughed. If you can ride a horse, why not a pig?...

The Theodore Rayffé Family :

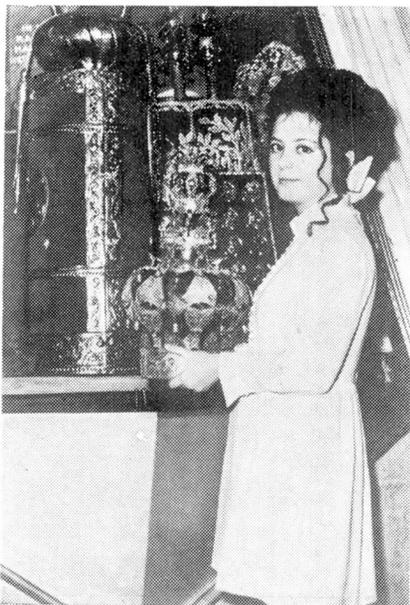


His parents.



Theodore Rayffé and his wife, Leanora.

Their daughter, Shifra.



Their daughter, Zahara.



Their son, Salomon Walter.





Leibesh and Malka Royffé

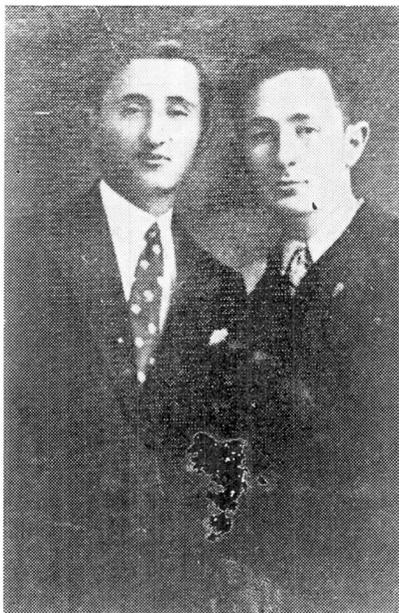
In 1930 his family emigrated to America where he started a new life. His brother Leibish was not permitted entry because he suffered from a lung disease. He remained alone in Rozhishch.

Now Tevya lives in Miami, Florida, where he is successful in his business. He has remained as warm-hearted as he was in childhood, always ready to help everyone out and to do a favour at all times. He is interested in Rozhishchers, and contributes wholeheartedly to the Israel committee for all its activities.

Leibesh and Manya Royffé



Theodore and Shmelik Widra



Theodore and Leibesh

