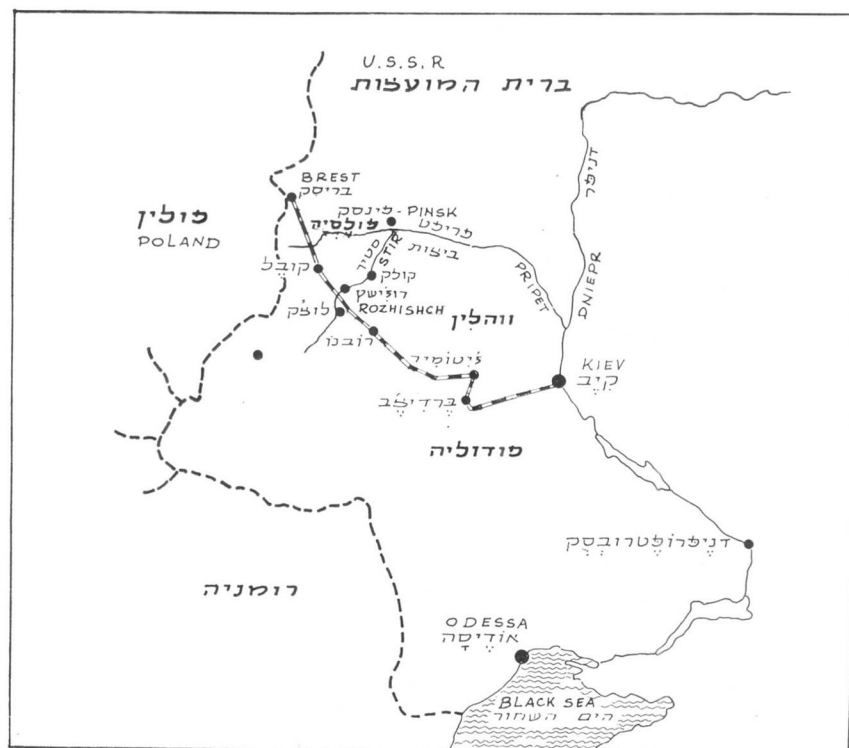


## ROZHISHCH IN MEMORIAM

### Geography and History

Rozhishch, a small town in the Ukrainian province of Volhynia, is situated on the Styr river, one of the tributaries of the Dnieper, about 12 miles from Lutsk and 30 from Kovel. The town was founded approximately 170 years ago, the 1847 census indicating a Jewish population of 702, rising to 3,169 of a total population of 4,342 fifty years later in 1897. The non-Jewish population was mainly Ukrainian with some German farmers and landowners, and some Poles.



Rozhishch after  
World War II, in  
U. S. S. R.

As it was situated in an agricultural district, the major occupations in the town were the marketing of farm crops and dairy products, flour mills, textile mills weaving local wools, and small trades. Rozhishch was a flourishing trade and industrial centre until the outbreak of the First World War, when it was almost completely destroyed and burned down. This caused great suffering to the Jews who were left with no sources of livelihood. There followed the chaotic period immediately after World War One, when Polish rule for the district was determined, and only then did the Jews begin to return to rebuild and restore the city and the sparkling life in it. The population again rose to some 5,000.

### THE TOWN

Rozhishch was a town having one main street, which ran down its centre. The market place was in the middle of the town. From this square the roads branched off, to the east to the town's wooden bridge (Untern-Brick), to the south to the road leading to Lutsk, and to the north to a more residential quarter built on the hill (Of'n Barg), and westward leading to the farm villages and hamlets of the hinterland.

Although the central part of the town was densely populated with the buildings crowding each other and people living in the quarters behind their businesses, the more suburban areas, and particularly the southern quarter near the railroad tracks were more prosperous, with cultivated gardens and fruit orchards.



### MARKET DAY

Monday was market day. Farmers from the entire region would stream into town with their carts and their produce, and the market-place together with the neighbouring streets were teeming with people, sacks of grain, vegetables, poultry, fruit etc. The livestock market, separate from the main fair, was situated in the northern part of the town.

Bustling, lively noisy activity was the mood of the day. The Jews buying agricultural products from the Gentile farmers, and the farmers trading in the Jewish shops for locally made goods, shoes, clothing, household wares, etc., and of course, the "wee drop" of vodka to lighten the soul. Trading and bargaining were brisk and vocal.

At that time it seemed that this was the natural order of things; the Ukrainian farmers supplying the products of the good black earth to the Jewish urban population, which in turn, supplied them with all the innovations of modern trade and industry, and that this order would continue to the end of time. Although the relations between the town Jews and the rural Christian farmers were not particularly hearty, that they would ever reach the degree of hatred which was sparked by the first slightest hint on the part of the Nazis was unimaginable.



## SPRING

As Rozhishch was a rural centre, life in the town changed its character with the seasons of the year. Spring marked rebirth after the melting of the snows and the ice. The town became radiant with cherry, pear and apple blossoms. The air was fragrant with lilac. But spring sometimes brought its own problems with it. The Styr would overflow; its waters covering the grass and at times even flooding the low-lying homes at the edge of town. Horses and cows grazing at the riverbank would get stuck in the mud, and it was a common sight to see friends and neighbours pulling and tugging with all their might at ropes in an effort to free the animals.

## PESSACH

Passover, a springtime festival, was preceded by preparations going back into the winter with the fattening of the geese. Shoshana Ziniuk Zaltzman recalls that her home resembled a factory on the evening the geese were slaughtered — with all the family gathering, some to pluck the fowl and others to cut it up into portions. But the real preparations for the feast began on the day after Purim with the beets being prepared for the passover borscht and the eggs being collected and put away and the matzoth being baked. Cupboards, and most particularly food cupboards, were taken out of doors and given a thorough cleaning. Copper and silverware were taken to a central spot, where the women and girls of the neighbourhood gathered in sweaty competition to outdo each other in shining these utensils. The stove was "kashered" for Pesach one or two days before the feast and pots and pans placed into cauldrons of boiling water and glassware soaked in the bathtub for three days.

On Seder morning the kitchen, of course, was the hub of feverish activity. All the traditional delicacies were being prepared, including the most eagerly awaited of all — the Kneidlach (matzah balls).



Shimon-Yossel, the carter (pheyton), as photographed by Alter Katzizna, and published in an art photography album.

And finally, the Seder itself. The table beautifully set — the festive air — the family all united. All the symbols of the age-old ritual marking the liberation of the Jewish people from slavery. And indeed, all sitting together, following the prescribed order (seder means order), they again felt a sense of freedom around the Passover table.

### SUMMER

Shavuoth was a late-spring, early summer festival. For Shavuoth the children would pick the greenery and reeds which custom demanded for the holiday and make it a point to see that they were distributed to all the townsfolk and the synagogues. When on the eve of Shavuoth the river banks were muddy, the boys would strip off their pants and wade out to gather the "lepeches" (reeds) required for the occasion.

Summer was marked by the ripening of the grain crops. The river became the centre of activity, particularly for the youth enjoying the summer vacation after a hard year of study at school, often accompanied by the hardships of studying away from home in most impoverished conditions. The youngsters relaxed, rowing on the calm blue Styr, watching the green banks on either side of them and listening to the chirping of the birds overhead. Swimming races were organized by the municipality for the Polish National Day. Occasionally, large boats, towed by huge strong peasants on foot could be seen on the river, passing through on to their destinations in Pinsk and Lutsk. One wondered whether these barges laden heavily with sacks of wheat and grain would ever reach their destinations.

The hub of activity on hot afternoons, and especially on Friday afternoons and Saturdays was the wooden bridge area. Youthful hi-jinks, horseplay, courting, and the well-tanned muscular Misha Korn, showing off by jumping off the bridge into the water to the great admiration of the children, were all part of the activities at the river's edge.



On a boat on the Styr

**Tisha-B'av** was the day of solemnity, fasting and mourning. The pre-fast meal usually consisted of broad noodles (lockshen) cooked in milk, after which the men would go to the synagogue wearing cloth mourning shoes, while the women, after calling to each other, "women, come and cry", would sit on the floor and keen, loudly mourning the destruction of the Second Temple. But the children, being children, exploited their elders' preoccupations for gathering balls of hay to throw in the hair of the town's eligible maidens.

### AUTUMN

Autumn was the season of the heavy rains and the mud. It was also the season of the High Holidays, and Yom Kippur, the day of Atonement, was the most sacred of all. The atmosphere of the Day

of Judgement began being felt several days before. The white hens which were to serve as "Kappora" — to take on the sins of the members of the family, were prepared, and when the time came, each person would fling the chicken round over his head (kapores).

In the Ziniuk home, which typified the great majority of Jewish homes, the father made his atonement at midnight, using his rooster, his voice choked with tears and emotion. The house was filled with awe. The following morning, no one worked. The men studied Gemorrah, the women busy in the kitchen. By late afternoon the atmosphere was tense. Relatives and neighbours came to ask forgiveness for the wrongs done the family in the course of the year. Weeping filled the house. The table was set for the pre-fast meal. The father blessed each member of the family individually. The parents went to the synagogue. The atmosphere was so solemn that the children felt that even a fish in water would shudder on Kol Nidre night.

But not all the autumn feasts were solemn. There was also Simchat Torah — the Hakafot in the synagogues, with the townspeople afterwards continuing the celebrations in private homes where, among all the special delicacies served, was vodka heated with pepper and honey. The atmosphere was gay — all singing and dancing, particularly the Hassidim, whose synagogues were crammed to overflowing, the elders dancing around the Torah. Women and children kissing the Torah and the joy was boundless, with drinking on this occasion being a Mitzvah.



## WINTER

Winter was cold, with snow and ice covering the ground. In winter the Styr changed its aspect completely, with youngsters skating on its icy surface, and out-of-town farmers were able to pass over it with their wagons, not having to use the bridge. Large blocks of ice were hewn out of the river and brought to a special cellar near the great Synagogue where they were kept to use in the summer or for storing medications. Heavy winter clothing and the ice made navigation in winter difficult, and so this was the indoor season. People tried to spend as much time as possible indoors, huddled around wood-burning stoves. Long winter evenings provided the ideal setting for study in the different synagogues and organizations; for the exchange of political ideas — communism — bundism — for sharing the dream of Zionism and of course, for just plain social exchange.

There were many wells in the town. Water was to be found almost anywhere you dug down 10 yards, and most of it was good for drinking. It was brought to the surface in a pail fastened by a chain to a post which was rolled up by a handle or pumped up.

The most famous of the wells was the Krenitze — the spring. Here people could come and draw water up in a pail directly from the cold spring. The water was fresh, cool, soul-satisfying. Although

the Krenitze did not freeze over in the winter, it was hard to get at because of the slippery ice.

The town changed its character on Shabbat and the holidays. All the shops were closed. In every home there was meat, fish, challa and a cholent in the stove. All dressed up for the holidays and the Gentiles did not come into town. Most of the Jews earned their livelihood in trade and there were hundreds of small shopkeepers, craftsmen and artisans. As a rule, people just made a living, and only a few were better off. There were no really wealthy people in the town at all, The Polish authorities levied very heavy taxes.

Rozhishch after  
World War II



# The Jewish Community

The history of the Jews in the town is connected with the history of the Jews in Volhynia. This part of the country was annexed to Russia in the partition of Poland among Russia, Austria and Prussia which took place in 1793. The town belonged to Russia for 122 years and the Jewish community was connected to the large Jewish centres in Odessa, Kiev, Moscow and Peterburg. They were part of the two million Jews, the majority of the Jewish people, which at that time had been annexed to Russia.

The Volhynian Jews were active in Jewish cultural life as an active part of Russian Jewry until the First World War. At the end of that war, Volhynia was partitioned, the eastern half going to Russia, and the western to Poland. After having passed from hand to hand several times, Rozhishch became Polish. Connections with the Jewish cultural centres in Russia were severed. New ties were developed with Warsaw and the west, however, all this lasted only about 20 years.

In 1939, Rozhishch, like all Volhynia, was transferred to the USSR, as provided for in the Molotov-Ribentrop agreement. In the Second World War, it was captured by the Nazis, and the entire Jewish community was slaughtered on 10 Elul 1942. Now the town belongs to the USSR, but there are no Jews at all left there.

The Jews of Volhynia had developed a special way of life, their own accent in Yiddish and Hebrew. There was Hassidism but without fanaticism and a special method of study in the Yeshivas. They excelled in their industry, their simplicity, and their honesty. They were active in all streams of stormy Jewish political and spiritual life of the end of the last century and the first four decades of this century.

Haim Nachman Bialik, the Hebrew poet-laureate, in whose work nature, the rebellion against Jewish ways of life in the Diaspora, and the awakening of nationalism heralding a new way of Jewish life are reflected, was a native of a village near Zhitomir. The author, Eliezer Smoli, is a native of Rozhishch.

The pre-World War One Rozhishch had two faces — the religious and the secular. There were the various Hassidic movements on the one hand, and the enthusiastic disciples of the Revolution on the other. And above all, the Hebrew Zionist movement, the Hechalutz movement — those who spoke Hebrew and those who loved Yiddish. They immigrated to Israel in all periods, with the Chibat Zion movement at the end of the 19th century, with the Second Aliyah at the start of this century. They now live in cities, villages and kibbutzim in Israel — they have helped in the struggles, the wars, the building of the state and in laying the foundation of Israeli society.





## EDUCATION

The Jews in Rozhishch aspired to give their children the best education they were capable of. Although there was a Russian school in the town in the days it was under Russian rule, parents did not like to send their children there because studies took place on the Sabbath. However, there were no illiterates among the Jewish population as differentiated from the Gentile, in which the rate of illiteracy was high. All the Jews were able to read and write Yiddish, a little Hebrew and to pray. Girls were generally sheltered, not being allowed to study outside of their own homes, so that it was mostly the daughters of the more well-to-do families who studied under private tutors. Boys studied in Yeshivas and Heders.

In the twenties traditional education underwent a serious crisis. The Yiddische Folkschule and particularly the Tarbuth school, influenced by the awakening of Zionism, attracted most of the children and the Heders and the Yeshivas were emptied. It was sad to see the pained learned men who had prepared generations of children for the Torah and good deeds watching their pupils leave them for secular education, which in their eyes, was "evil influences" and "depravity" — but the movement could not be checked, nor could the clock be turned back.

Most of the children studied in the Tarbuth school which was organized and conducted in the Zionist pioneering spirit. The school was supported by fees paid by the children and by special activities they organized in order to balance the budget and pay the teachers' salaries. These activities included theatrical productions by Zionist troupes, collections of donations, draws, etc. The Polish government did not allocate any funds whatsoever to assist this school, although free education was available in the Polish governmental schools.

The groups of Zionist-inspired youth, including Yitzhak Zisskind,

The Tarbuth School, 1929: pupils, teachers and members of the Parents Committee.



the Fleischer brothers and Avraham Pelzman, first started founding a Hebrew library, with Lamdan's "Massada", Mapu's "Ahavat Zion" and books of that nature being the foundation stone of the library. Children, whose education was even more secularly oriented had studied in the Folkschule, but with the developing streams of Jewish thought taking form, Yiddish learning was the realm of the Yiddishists — the Bund — popularly known as the "leftists". The registration in the Folkschule declined, with more and more pupils enrolling in the Tarbuth school.

This school was the centre of activity of all the Zionist parties. The library attached to the school ensured that Hebrew books published in Warsaw, Berlin and Jerusalem would reach the youth who looked forward to their arrival as to that of a dear, welcome guest, and these books often served as subjects for discussion in small groups.

Although the language of the Jews in the town was Yiddish, the youth enthused with the Zionist ideal spoke Hebrew amongst themselves. As Volhynia was remote from the large centres of either Russian or Polish culture, there were only a few who knew Russian in the period before the First World War, and fewer still knowing Polish in the inter-war period. Thus, a Jewish nationalist awareness and a rich independent way of Jewish life developed without the assimilationist influences which were rife in Poland at the time.

#### **THE ZIONIST MOVEMENT**

As has been said, Rozhishch was very alive to and aware of all the trends in the mainstream of eastern European Jewish thought in the latter part of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth. Naturally, therefore, the town's youth were



Haim Pfeffer (second right) working as a Halutz in the Goldberg orchard in Ramat Gan in 1925.



The old Jewish orphanage.

swept away on the intellectual waves of revolutionary thinking. There were two socialist Zionist movements at the turn of the century, the Socialist Zionists and the Poalei Zion (Workers of Zion). Ze'ev Ehrlich describes the manifestation of October 17, 1905, the day of the granting of the constitution — with the masses demonstrating, carrying guns, and red flags and singing the Marseillaise. He says further that with the repression of the revolution, and more particularly with rumours reaching them of pogroms in Zhitomir, the movement dispersed and many of the youth left Rozhishch to pursue their studies in larger centres and abroad.

As an indication of the polarity in Jewish thought of the time, he relates that in 1902—1904 when pogroms raged through eastern Europe, self defence movements were established by the youth. In Rozhishch the Zionists set up their own self-defence unit while the left wing Bundists set up their independent unit. Even in this vital area of Jewish life, these groups were incapable of finding a common language.

A few years after the repression of the revolution, the Zionist movements again became active. Youngsters gathered in order to discuss their Zionist dreams, to collect Shekels, to listen to lecturers brought in from the outside, with anyone having come from Eretz Israel receiving special welcome and rapt attention. They purchased Hebrew books and organized many activities.

#### **YOUTH AND HECHALUTZ MOVEMENT**

The Hebrew chapter on the Hehalutz and the Zionist movement contains some rather fascinating descriptions of the degree of hardship these youngsters were prepared to suffer in order to fulfill their Zionist ideals, particularly in the Hachshara or training camps. These are interesting descriptions of Jewish youth undertaking heavy physical labour in order to finance the Tarbut school, their training farm or other Zionist projects. Much is made of how important it was for them to change the image of the Jew from that of the traditional middle man of the caricatures to the hard-worker prepared to do any physical labour at all. There are descriptions of the generation gap — traditional life in Poland versus the dream of Zion. Some parents are won over; others, use all the stratagems at their disposal to prevent their sons, and most particularly their daughters, from reaching the Holy Land, or bringing them back after they had already reached their destination.

The battle of the generations relating to the Zionist ideal and its tragedy is inherent in the stories of those many Rozhishch youngsters who did not see their dream of Zion materialize. Those who remained in Rozhishch because of difficulties encountered in making their Aliya (shortages of certificates required by the Mandatory regime, and others), or those who acquiesced to the wishes of their parents, who for reasons mostly related to the orthodox religious opposition to the movement, did not want their children to immigrate to Eretz Israel, and remained in Rozhishch.



One very touching case is related at length in the Hebrew portion of this book. Eliezer Braker ran away from the high school in Vilna where he had been studying in 1913. On his arrival in Eretz Israel he worked in Ben Shemen with Berl Katznelson, Rahel Ben Zvi and other founders of the Labour movement in Eretz Israel. However, his father became ill. Some said because of anxiety for his son. And one year later young Braker was persuaded to return to his sick father. Unfortunately, he was caught up in the turmoil of the First World War and escaped together with his family to Odessa, where he was later imprisoned by the Stalinists for his Zionist activities. He spent many years in Siberia in conditions of dreadful hardship. Word of him reached Israel through a former prison mate who had been repatriated to Germany, and eventually, letters from Braker himself started reaching former colleagues and friends in Israel. These letters, written in beautiful Hebrew, very poignantly expressed his sorrow that his great dream had not



Eliezer Braker, Prisoner of Zion, (right with hat on knee) in Ben-Shemen in 1913. In centre, second from left, Berl Katznelson, one of the founders of the Labour Zionist movement.

materialized and the hope that it could still be fulfilled. The torch was being kept akindle, despite repression by the Soviet dictatorship. Unfortunately all contact with Braker ceased in 1966. It has since been learned that he died a few years ago.

#### **BETAR AND THE REVISIONIST MOVEMENT**

In the final years of the Polish rule, many of the Jewish youth who had finished their primary schooling and who were looking for a way out of the distress caused them as a result of the restrictions on immigration to Palestine and the shaky economic situation in Poland, were attracted to Zionist party activity. It was in the party clubs that they found their social peers, and it was through party activity and arguments over a better future that they found their outlet. As Rozhishch reflected all the mainstreams of Jewish thought of the period, many found their way to Betar. The Betar group was active in the controversy which broke out in the Zionist camp between the Hehalutz and the Revisionist movements. This very sharp controversy augmented the activities of both splinters of the Zionist camp. As the Hehalutz movement strengthened so did Betar, and the Brith HaHayal (the soldier's alliance). The quarrel which Jabotinsky had with Weizman and the leaders of the Zionist movement found its echoes in Rozhishch.

The quarrels and differences of opinion were many and sharp. At one point when the Zionist Hehalutz set up a training camp in an abandoned part of a Jewish orphanage, Betar, having found out about this, sent a group of their people, squatted at the site, and refused to leave, claiming that they were entitled to and would retain possession of half the space available.

Arguments were lively and heated amongst the youth of Rozhishch but it was only in those between Betar and Hehalutz that they spilled over into fisticuffs.

As well as being politically active, the Betar boys were also sports enthusiasts and formed one of the three football teams in the town.

A member of the Betar Hachshara was Shlomo Ben Yoseph (Tabachnik) of Lutsk who was to be the first Jew executed by the British in 1938. He had reached Eretz Israel as an "illegal" immigrant in 1937. Several other Betar members became involved in underground activities in Israel against the British.



# Religious and Cultural Life

Synagogues formed the foundation of life in the town and there were a number of them, including Hassidic prayer houses. Although they were primarily places of prayer, they also served as a meeting place for social arguments, exchanges of political opinion, for initiating action on local public affairs, for lectures by delegates from Eretz Israel, Hazanic concerts, meetings, elections and the like.

## SYNAGOGUES

The largest of the synagogues was the Great Synagogue, which was destroyed in the First World War. Later, its members began its restoration investing great efforts to make it an impressive structure. Unfortunately, the restoration was not completed before it was totally destroyed in the Second World War.

The Beit HaMidrash or Study Hall was also destroyed in the First World War. Its members, who came from all parts of town, did not consider themselves as belonging to any specific Hassidic group. The Beit HaMidrash was open to all Jews, and enjoyed a particularly warm atmosphere. Among its regular congregants were merchants from the villages and hamlets in the district who came to town on market day. It sometimes seemed that they enjoyed their prayer and study more than the trading and bargaining which followed. Almost any night, a group could be found studying at the Beit HaMidrash late into the night.

The Trisk Hassidic Synagogue was built in the twenties with a donation left in the will of Y. Ehrlich who had died in the United States. There was a very special, social atmosphere in this synagogue. The congregation was very aware not only of spiritual matters, but also of the worldly affairs troubling the Jewish communities. Many youth who came to the synagogue tended to conduct political arguments rather than prayers there. The arguments centred on the Zionist movement, and when the arguments disturbed the religious procedures, the Gabbai would tell the "shkutzim" to be quiet.

Other synagogues included the Zhalibover Synagogue, Das Kashivker Schilchen, the Olikier Hassidic Synagogue.

The town Rabbi was Rabbi Avraham Ber Gitman. He prayed at the Great Synagogue. Rabbi Moshe'le Spector prayed at the Olik Hassidic Synagogue, and in the later years of the Polish rule, kept the registry books of the Jewish community and was considered to be the government Rabbi. People consulted the Rabbis for judgements in matters of Kashrut, in trade and business matters and sometimes even Gentiles would "go to the Rabbi" in order to have an argument between themselves and the Jews settled.

Rabbi Moshe'le Spector spent many years writing "Divrai Moshe", a collection of his sermons over the years. Only one copy



Reb Hershel Ba'al Shem (Rubinstein). He was a Trisker Hassid, one of the respected elders of the town about whom many legends evolved.

of the book remains today, and this is the only remnant of any of the Rozhishch rabbinical families, all of whom perished in the Holocaust.

From time to time preachers would come to town. Notices would be posted in the synagogues giving dates and subjects of their sermons. Most came to obtain donations for Yeshivas or other religious organizations. Some were religious fanatics, preaching "fire and brimstone", warning their listeners of the "depravity" of football, immodest dress and secular thought. Zionism often served as the major target for their attacks.

Particularly well-received among the townsfolk were the Zionist preachers who kept them abreast of what was happening in Eretz Israel. They usually spoke in the Great Synagogue.

Each synagogue had its own cantor, and often visiting cantors would come to town to pray and later sing, giving impressive demonstrations of their talents and skills.

### **THEATRE IN ROZHISHCH**

There were two talented and enthusiastic amateur theatrical groups in town which regularly presented plays by Jewish and other authors. The directors of the groups were talented and totally devoted to the amateur theatricals, and their enthusiasm attracted many youngsters who were anxious to participate in all aspects of these productions.

Although these troupes had started out as one group, they soon parted company. One working mainly for the Folkschule — the leftists, while the other dedicated its income to the Tarbuth school and was considered to be the Zionist troupe.

Every performance became an event in the town, and often became the centre of controversy. The orthodox, in particular, were opposed to this "evil influence" which was attracting the youth in a secular direction away from tradition.

The talents of these two groups, led by Peisi Klimbord and Alter Shames, were praised by professional players who from time to time visited the town.

### **A WEDDING IN ROZHISHCH**

Preparations began about half a year before the date of the wedding, when the tailor, accompanied by six girl assistants, came to start sewing the bride's trousseau and the wedding clothes for members of the family and relatives. As the second stage of preparation, the caterer would arrive with his assistants and cooks to prepare the wedding delicacies. The door of the bride's house seemed never to close in the two or so months before the wedding, when all the relatives and neighbours came to help out with advice, ideas, or just to bother and get into the way.

On the week of the wedding, a kind of family reunion took place. They came from all over the district, bringing and showing off their small children, and the house seemed to have turned into some kind of a fair.



Founders of the theatre in the town:  
Alter Shames, Pesach Klimbord and  
Yoseph Linden in 1920.



The Rozhishch Klesmer-Kapelle. The Rozhishch orchestra before World War One.

Then the groom's family came to conduct the negotiations over the Nedunia (dowry). A large wedding dinner was given for hundreds of guests in the neighbours' houses all along the length of the street, as there were no halls in those days.

The Chupa was set up out of doors and the Klesmer orchestra played. After the ceremony and the Seven Blessings, the guests dispersed, the family returning home, tired, exhausted and the house looked as though it had been hit by a pogrom. In the town, the jokers, the gossips and the good townspeople continued talking about the wedding, the in-laws, the dowry; each praising or criticizing according to his nature, until the date of the next wedding in the town approached.

### **NICKNAMES**

Almost no one in the town was known by his real name. Nicknames were found for almost everyone. These nicknames could have their basis in the person's city or village of origin; his trade or profession; his parents' names; or his character or physical traits. The humorous nicknames which stuck to some people were often accepted in good humour, but sometimes they did hurt and insult the people involved.

### **THE BENEVOLENT SOCIETIES (GMILUTH HESED)**

In 1935 and 1936 the economic situation in the town worsened. Its two banks closed down. The Polish government, following its anti-semitic policy, levied heavy taxes and restrictions on Jews. There was incitement against them, and the Polish nationalist party picketed Jewish stores throughout Poland to prevent Gentiles buying there. Many shopkeepers and tradesmen were in real financial distress. At this point it was learned in Rozhishch that a Mutual Aid Society operated by the Joint Distribution Committee had been established in Warsaw.

A group met in the Great Synagogue and decided to form a mutual aid society requesting JDC assistance. The Joint consented



to participate with them on a zloty for zloty basis. It was agreed to canvass for members. Each member who paid his monthly fee of half a zloty was entitled to receive a relatively long term loan free of interest when the need arose.

The fund grew as people came to respect it. It was scrupulously managed, and its balances published. By 1938, it had the largest turnover of any such fund in Poland. The fund continued operating until the Russian take-over in 1939. The Soviet regime forbade mutual aid schemes of this nature.

### THE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

In Czarist times, Itzik Starosta (Geller) held a position of leadership and was authorized to issue passports and other official documents. Later, the Poles set up an elected Municipal Council, consisting of 11 Jews and 2 Poles, but never permitting a Jew to be mayor.

### THE COMMUNITY COUNCIL (KEHILLA)

This council had 8 members elected by the male Jewish population. Its functions were responsibility for ritual slaughtering, maintenance of the cemetery, the community registries and similar matters.

### A FEW ROZHISHCH FIGURES AND PERSONALITIES

The town boasted of a number of outstanding personalities. There were those known for their talmudic studies, for their charitable activities, for their generosity, their wealth, their character, and even for their eccentricities. There was **Kolchak**, the local joker, and there was also the village idiot, **Maikey**.



Shmuel Diamandstein and the orphanage committee, with their guest, the Jewish Member of the Polish Parliament (Seim), Dr. Shipper.



We will mention only a few of the respected figures described in greater length in the Hebrew portion of this book.

**Reb Eliahu Pfeffer** was a figure respected by all factions in the town. The large wholesale house, in which he was a partner, the Cellar, became a town institution, the centre of many philanthropic enterprises, educational and cultural activities. His special interests were welfare and religious causes. His children were all active in the Zionist movement, but he adopted the Yeshiva and its students, encouraging them and giving them counsel, making sure that they had the best teachers available, and concerning himself with the curriculum. It was characteristic of Reb Eli Pfeffer that even in the trying conditions of the Nazi ghetto, he found the spiritual strength to provide encouragement and backing to those around him.

**Reb Yisrael Baer Zinyuk** was an intellectual with an excellent background in Jewish classics. He had studied in the Volozin Yeshiva which had produced HaRav Kook, Chief Rabbi of Israel, and the poet, Bialik. His home became the meeting centre for local intellectuals. He prayed at the Trisker Synagogue which attracted the intellectually aware among the religious youth. He was not rigid in his religious observance, and would often spend Saturday afternoons taking walks along the Styr, enjoying nature with his friends.

There was also **Reb Avraham Sikiler (Smoliar)**, a man who refused to change with the times. He devoted himself to teaching Talmud and Humash. In the Beit HaMidrash he taught the portion of the week to those coming to the early morning Minyan. He would, of course, accept no payment for this, despite his impoverished circumstances.

The more the world around him changed, the more Avraham Sikiler retreated to his books and his studies. Although he was very proud of his two sons who had immigrated to Eretz Israel as halutzim, and particularly of his son, Eliezer Smoli, the famous Israeli writer, he mourned their rejection of religious observance.



Reb Eliahu Pfeffer



## LIFE UNDER THE SOVIETS

# The Second World War

The rhythm of life in Rozhishch was to change drastically, and within a very short period of time. At the end of August 1939 all the carefully nurtured plans and hopes were cruelly nipped in the bud with the black clouds of war descending over all Europe. On September first Hitler's troops invaded Poland. Confusion and the fear of what lay ahead increased steadily. The state of war continued two weeks and then the Government of Poland fell.

In the second half of September 1939 the Red Army crossed the western Ukrainian border to the banks of the Bug, which marked the boundary between German-occupied Poland and the western Ukraine, which was then annexed to the Ukrainian Soviet Republic. Life under the Soviets took on a completely different aura.



### THE SOVIETS ARRIVE IN ROZHISHCH

As told by **Daniel Golombka**

In the summer of 1939 rumour was that war was about to break out. One day a few of us gathered in Geller's cafeteria to listen to the news on the radio, there being no radio sets in private homes. We heard Hitler's hysterics as he threatened disaster to all who stood in his way. He referred particularly to the Jews (die Juden, die Juden) as being responsible for everything.

The following Friday the market place was crowded with Gentiles who had come from the villages. The news came that war had broken out. All the farmers immediately dispersed; trenches were dug inside the market. That evening the President of Poland and the Polish Chief of Staff broadcast over the radio, declaring that Poland would never give an inch and calling for courage.

On Sunday, masses of Jewish refugees started arriving from Warsaw and western Poland. The town was bombed by the Germans,



one bomb falling on the railway station. Many people left their homes to seek safety in the villages. My mother took some food and the Shabbat candlesticks and we made our way to the village of Tschuben where we stayed with a Gentile lady.

The communist youth had packed their things planning to proceed towards the Russian border. In the middle of the night the rumour spread that the Russians were coming. We all returned to our homes. The immediate danger had passed.

The following morning found the communist youth, Jews and Ukrainians, rejoicing in the streets. We, members of Betar, immediately went to the clubhouse to burn the membership registry and destroy other documentation which may prove to be incriminating.

The communists set up a militia of local youth. They enthusiastically decided to form a guard of honour to welcome the Red Army, decorating the square with pictures of Stalin and the communist greats and bringing the fire brigade orchestra. But instead of the victorious Red Army, a train arrived bearing a load of Polish troops who apparently had not heard of the Molotov-Ribbentrop agreement. The newly-formed militia enthusiastically set out to capture the Polish troops. Shooting and general chaos followed with all those in the vicinity taking cover, including those who had gathered to welcome the Reds. The Soviets assured us that under their regime there would be equality for all, that they did not differentiate between Jews, Poles, Ukrainians, etc. They issued an order to open the shops and to trade as usual. The Soviets, themselves, buying everything they could lay their hands on and in short order emptying the stores. Many merchants then started hiding some goods because it was possible to obtain food from the peasants only in exchange for goods. Soon the police started conducting searches for hidden goods. They were aided by locals who had been communists still in the days of the Poles, and who had been forced to work for the secret police. When concealed goods were found, public trials were held and the sentence was deportation to Siberia. This sentence had a very depressing effect on the town because Siberia was synonymous with hard labour and death from cold and starvation.

Among those sentenced were Yankele (Shuster) Greenboim's sons, Haim and Motel, Aharon Tepper and his brother Wolf. After great efforts on the part of Lazer Shapira, Wolf Tepper's sentence was squashed. But fate would have otherwise — Aharon Tepper and Haim and Motel Greenboim who were sent to Siberia, survived the war, whereas Wolf Tepper who remained in Rozhishch, perished together with all the Jews of the town at the hands of the Nazis.

One day I was ordered to come to the police station. I was told that it was known that I had belonged to the "Zionist-Fascist" Betar. I replied that I had, but that now times were different and I was a-political. I was pressured to join the secret police, but managed to get out of that.



Daniel Golombka and wife.

Those who in the past had been Zionists, members of Hehalutz or Betar, were disturbed from time to time. We were awakened in the middle of the night to do snow removal or other similar hard physical labour. This situation lasted for about two months until the Soviets sent people from Russia to take over the civil municipal administration and these latter removed the locals from positions of authority.

I received an identity card classifying me as a merchant, an unpardonable sin under a communist regime. This made it impossible for me to obtain work, and suffering lay in store for me. But salvation came from an unexpected direction. As I had been an excellent football player, I was asked to play on the local football team...

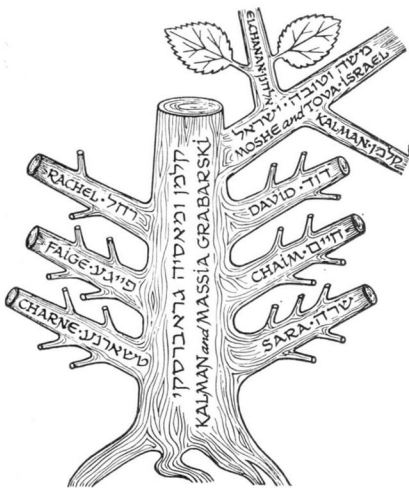
I later received a call-up notice together with many youths. I served in a unit of the Soviet Liaison Corps. While I was serving in Lutsk, the war between Russia and Germany broke out. Although we had been ordered to proceed to the front, a confused retreat ensued and the officer in charge told us we were free to fend for ourselves. The Ukrainian soldiers in the unit happily took off for their homes. I rejoined the unit in the Korosten woods until the receipt of Stalin's order dismissing all the troops from the territories annexed under the Ribentrop-Molotov agreement from the Red Army. We were sent to forced labour camps near Saratov where we did extremely difficult physical labour and were given terrible food. We literally starved, Hershel Katz dying of hunger there. Later we were sent to Omsk in Siberia.

## THE GREAT ESCAPE

### Moshe Grabarski

On May 4, 1941 the Soviets took most of the Rozhishch youth for 90 days military training and physical labour. I was sent with a building unit to the village of Uzhovo where an airfield was being built. The work was hard and the conditions extremely difficult. During this period the war broke out unexpectedly, and the confusion and disorder were great.

Together with several officers, I ran away in the direction of Rovno eventually making my way to Zhitomir. Then the order from Stalin came dismissing all the residents of the western frontier region of the USSR, including those from Volhynia, from the army because they were considered to be untrustworthy, many of the Ukrainians having defected to the Germans who had promised them independence. We were sent to work, always under difficult conditions and in dangerous locations. We were under the command of an antisemitic Ukrainian officer who led us to the work site. We had to walk forty kilometers to work each day. We were sent from one location to the other, some being extremely remote.



The Kalman Grabarski Family Tree.  
Only one of the family survived, to  
build his home in Israel.

Eventually word reached us that a Polish army was mobilizing and that there was an enlistment office in Saratov. I, Moshe Klimbrod, Hershel Shneider, and others ran away from our work village, without certificates and without money. We were fortunate to find a high ranking Jewish officer who assisted us. We succeeded in reaching Saratov where there were many Polish refugees returning from Siberia. It was here that we joined the Polish army.

We trained and served in the army, all the time suffering the antisemitism of the Poles. We served with Anders' army in Iran, Iraq and later in Eretz Israel, from where we were to prepare to be sent to the Italian front. But having so long suffered discrimination, humiliation and degradation, we decided to leave the Polish army and to remain. We were finally able to breathe the air of freedom.

## IN THE SOVIET PERIOD

### Zvi Roiter

The Soviets classified my parents as "bourgeoisie" which signified expulsion to Siberia. Through great effort and bribery, this sentence was cancelled. I started to study at the Russian school, but was not accepted into the "Pioneers", the communist youth movement, because of my father's background. In school we received military training along with our studies.

During that period many Jewish refugees who had escaped from Central Poland arrived in Rozhishch. The local Jews received them well and helped them in obtaining work, housing and certificates. Five people from one family lived in our home. They were superior shoemakers, opened a workshop and received residence rights. From time to time rumours would reach us of the Nazi treatment of the Polish Jews.

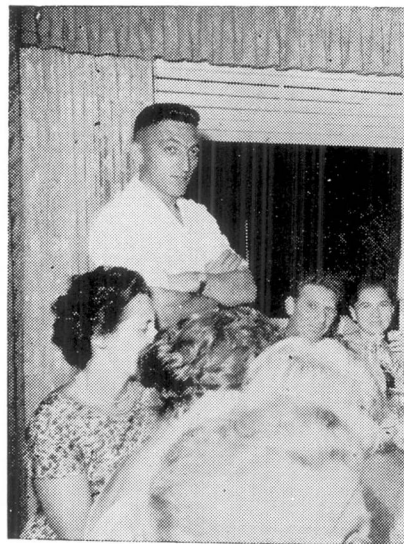
With the German invasion, the Russians started a confused retreat. Many refugees, as well as townspeople started fleeing to Russia.

A Russian pilot was living in our home at the time. He offered to take us all to Russia in his plane. We decided to escape with him. Our bundles were already packed. But, at the last minute, Mother changed her mind. She did not want to leave behind the fruits of an entire lifetime. We brothers refused to leave without her. My brothers, Haim and Leibel, were conscripted into the Red Army, but returned after a short while, because their units had broken up because of the lack of order and discipline.

## THE SOVIET PERIOD IN THE SURROUNDING VILLAGES

told by **Pnina Korn** from Berezelup.

The reception of the "liberating" Russians in September 1939 was festive and jubilant on the part of the poor and of the proletariat;



Zvi Roiter (standing) during a reception at Beth Rozhishch.



Pnina Korn with mother.

whereas the rich received them with reservations, wondering what awaited them under a Bolshevik regime.

Within a short period, hundreds of officials and party workers started arriving from Russia, setting up all the administrative mechanism with the assistance of the local communists.

We tried to live our lives as usual. An order was issued to sell the goods in our store at pre-war prices and for Polish currency. All the stock disappeared almost immediately.

At that time there was large traffic of Jewish refugees who had escaped from the cities captured by the Nazis, and from time to time my father would bring some refugees home with him on his return from one of his visits to Rozhishch. In our home we had no food problem. We still had some left over from our farm, and mother would cook large quantities of food as she had been used to doing in the days when all the family would come home to the village on vacation. The atmosphere in our home was good. Two of the refugee boys staying with us even managed to bring their fiancées over from across the border and to marry in our village. And so they continued to live with us until the authorities started taking too great an interest in their activities and in their identity cards. They were forced to move on to another location.

After the Russians had dug into the cities, they started realizing their policies in the fields of economics and agriculture. Tens of workers were sent to the villages in order to organize Kolhozes. The farmers' land, as well as our fields and those of grandfather were quickly transferred to the communal ownership of the Kolhoz. The family was left with only a vegetable patch. Grandfather's large home was expropriated and the village council offices set up there. He and his family were allocated cramped living quarters.

The adult petit bourgeois generation suffered much from the Russians. On the other hand, for the young generation, new perspectives were opened in acquiring education and professions. The government financed studies, which I even managed to continue. And so two years passed, without anything special happening.

This different, inconvenient, but not unendurable way of life continued until June 1941 when the Germans attacked the Russian army and marched into the western Ukraine.



## THAT WE NOT FORGET

# The Nazis enter Rozhishch

JUNE 22, 1941, THE GERMANS COME TO ROZHISHCH

told by Berl (Dov) Schneider.

On their first day in town, the Germans killed ten Jews, among them Shlomo Klimbrod and Mottel Bronfn. The following day, they ordered the Jews to gather in front of the Gornstein theatre. Several hundred Jews came and arranged themselves as if for a parade. An order was issued for them to turn in the arms they possessed, but the Jews had no arms. On that day the Germans did not physically hurt people. They ordered us to run home. It was forbidden to walk. People were sped on their way by sharp blows from rifle butts.

The following day, they took Koppleman and killed him in the cruellest fashion imaginable. The Jews were ordered to gather in the marketplace while the Germans selected a Judenrat (council of Jews). A Jewish police unit was also appointed. They wanted to make me a policeman, but I paid the Judenrat five thousand rubles not to force me into that position.

In about a week, Gestapo people came, rounded-up some eighty of the town elite, educated and influential people. They said they were taking them away to work. These people never returned, and to this day their fate is not known.

About eight days after that, they took several hundred young people away to "work". These, too, did not return. The third time they took even old men and children over the age of twelve. Only women and small children and those who had managed somehow to evade the three actions remained.

The local commandant said that these people had been sent to work in remote locations, and that now there would be order. From time to time, the Germans demanded that furs and leather were to be remitted to them, and these were handed over as demanded. Several months went by in relative tranquility.





## A CHILD WATCHES THE GERMANS ENTER ROZHISHCH

As told by **Zvi Roiter**

When the Germans entered the city, the Jews took cover. I, as a child sat with Ukrainian neighbours watching the sight which struck terror into the hearts of the Jews. A motorcycle cavalcade of German soldiers came riding into Rozhishch, each with a trained wolfhound beside him.

The nationalist Ukrainians were happy at the coming of the Germans, and even fired at the backs of the retreating Russians. On that very day a few Jews were shot by the Germans. The following day several more Jews were taken to the marketplace and shot. Then panic overtook the Jewish population as the Ukrainian nationalists started going wild, victimizing Jews through robbery, extortion and cruelty.

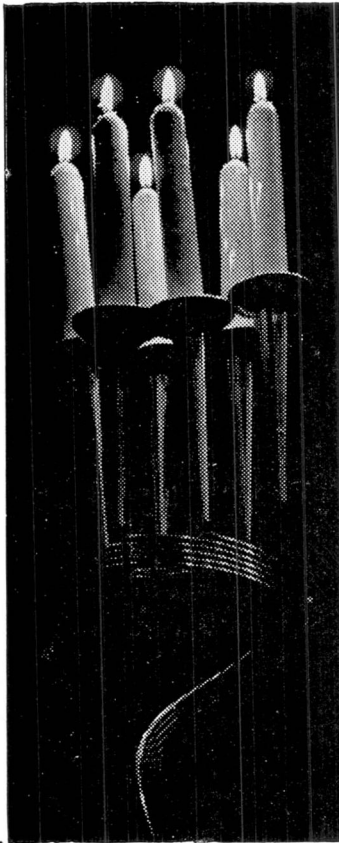
Different orders were issued every day. The Jews were ordered to relinquish their horses, cows, bicycles, radios, etc. A notice was published saying that people were required for work. At first people were taken in, and registered, however when the fate of those who had left for work became clear, the populace started hiding. Then the Germans would conduct a roundup — a siege. They would surround the town at night and in the morning would go from house to house and take the youths away for "work". In the third round-up they took my brother Haim and my uncle Motel Roiter together with his son Manny. My brother Bebe managed to escape after having been taken.

In the fourth roundup they took also old people and young children. My favourite brother Bebe hid among the cows and horses. The Ukrainian police found him. Bebe jumped onto one of the grazing horses, and started off in the direction of the fields, but a policeman, on horseback too, caught him.

Those captured, and Bebe among them, were killed and all buried together in one pit. I had loved my brother Bebe very much and could not calm down. In my heart of hearts I believed that perhaps he was still alive. In the middle of the night, I took my cousin, and the two of us stole away to the pit. We heard the sighs and the groans of the dying, and I even recognized some of their faces. We did not find Bebe. We returned depressed and in despair. We did not dare tell our parents what we had done.

A Ukrainian family with whom we had been friendly, Tomashevitz, lived in the neighbourhood. Kola, the son, had come to ask how he could help us. Mother suggested that he join the police, and from there he would be able to help us. It was Kola who told us that all those captured, and among them Bebe, had been killed. He told us and he cried.

My brother Leibel who had escaped from the disintegrating Soviet army was captured immediately on his return to Rozhishch and nothing more has ever been heard of him.



## THE ROZHISHCH GHETTO

### Berl Schneider

After about four months of the German conquest, all the Jews were expelled from their homes and concentrated into a ghetto in the northern part of town, Oifen Barg, in conditions of inhuman crowding.

One morning the Germans came with a demand for 100 labourers. There were no longer many illusions. All understood that the intention was to kill those who reported. Policemen combed the houses, rounding up about 300 men. I was among these. They brought us to a yard and arranged us in two rows. The row on the left was ordered to run home, and those on the right ordered to remain. I was in the left hand row. We were chased by the Ukrainian policemen who beat us cruelly with their rifle butts. Those in the other line were taken away by train and never heard from again.

The food allocation in the ghetto was fifty grams of bread per person per day and nothing more. There were those who endangered themselves in order to obtain a loaf of bread and paid for this with their lives.

I looked for ways to obtain food to help save my family and as many as possible of those imprisoned in the ghetto from death by starvation. With a few friends, I organized a special operation which somewhat improved our economic situation. The two sons of Leibish Chaves and Benny Bronstein would steal out of the ghetto at nights in carts and go to Kovel. With the money we gave them, they bought items such as needles, thread, pins, etc. and other small but important commodities which had disappeared on the local market and were therefore, in great demand by the local villagers.

The people leaving the ghetto for work each morning would exchange these goods for bread and other foodstuffs, which they smuggled back into the ghetto in the evening at great risk. These foodstuffs saved many people from death by starvation.

One day the commandant came and demanded that he be given fifty rubles per person. As there were about 4,000 people in the ghetto, 20,000 rubles had to be collected. We went out in pairs to collect from those whom we knew to have money. The required sum was obtained, some people giving freely, others under a little pressure. I collected together with Reb Eliahu Pfeffer. At a meeting attended by many of the local notables, it was decided to bring 18,000 rubles to the commandant for fear that he would come forth with further demands if the entire sum was given him so easily.

When the money was brought to him, he immediately demanded another 20,000 rubles, and that in silver and gold coins. The Judenrat was forced to obtain this sum, too. When they brought it to him, the commandant told them that the money was all right but that they were not. And that night all the members of the Judenrat except Avrahamchik Geller and Yankel Krochmal were killed. The ghetto lasted for about eighteen months.



Berl Shneider with daughter.

## IN THE GHETTO

**Zvi Roiter**

People wandered the streets of the ghetto swollen with starvation. On being expelled to the ghetto we were permitted to take only what we could carry. All our property remained in our abandoned homes. Our family lived in Grandmother Kayla's house, together with another about 60 people. Those who were able to leave the ghetto in the mornings for enforced labour improved their lot because they came into contact with the Gentiles and sometimes received food in exchange for goods. It was forbidden to bring food of any kind in on returning to the ghetto, however, many took the risk and sometimes managed to bring in a loaf of bread or something.

Mother managed to have me join twelve labourers who had received permission to work in Baruch Priegal's Untern Brick wool factory. We would leave the ghetto in the morning and return in the evening. It was forbidden for Jews to walk on the sidewalks. We walked on the road marked with patches on our clothing.

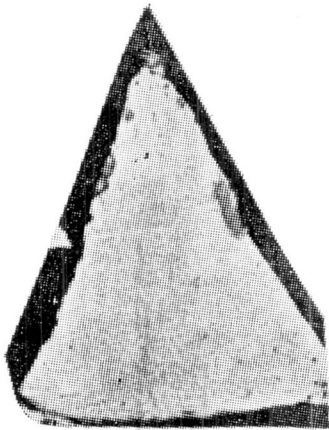
I would sometimes sell a ring, a garment or cloth to the Gentiles and in exchange for this I would bring in a slice of bread, a little flour, some oil. Once I tried to bring two bottles of oil hidden in the sleeves of my coat into the ghetto. A Ukrainian policeman found the oil, beat me and took me to the police station. At the entrance to the station, I had to pass between two rows of policemen who beat me cruelly with their sticks, and afterwards I was thrown, injured, to the cellar.

During the night, the cellar gate was suddenly opened and I heard someone calling me. It was Kola, our Ukrainian friend now serving with the police. He took me out of the cellar, put me on his bike and brought me back to the ghetto. He had saved me from certain death.

Kola, who was a real friend to our family would warn us of what was about to happen. One day when we returned from work we noticed suspicious movement among the Ukrainian police. When I passed Kola's house, he came out and told me to run away. He said that I should tell those in the ghetto that this was their last day.

This knowledge spread through the ghetto and many tried to escape. But they encountered the guard which had already encircled the ghetto and shot anyone approaching the fence. It was announced over the loudspeakers that all were to gather at the Village Council House (Gmina).

Kola came, put my sister on his bike and brought her to the attic of his home. He later returned and took my mother to a village bordering the ghetto. Together with Mottel Dolgopoluk and his two brothers-in-law and the Priegal family, I managed to reach the banks of the Styr. Although there was a heavy guard on the bridge, Lozer Priegal and I managed to drag a boat which was under the bridge. We transported people, some of whom did not know





how to swim, to the other side of the Styr. That night we hid in the wool in the attic of the factory.

At dawn we started to flee to the fields in the direction of the village of Dubishtsh. We heard the Gentiles saying, "Today we will bury the Jews."

## DESTRUCTION OF THE GHETTO

### Berl Schneider

Every morning I would leave the ghetto for work. My six year old daughter asked me many times to take her with me. On the Friday before the destruction of the ghetto, my daughter again begged me to take her with me, and my wife, too, urged me to do so. I took her, but left her in the village of Kopachivka at the home of a Polish farmer because her feet had blistered badly during the long walk. When I came to pick her up to take her home, the Pole suggested that we spend the night there, as the child was unable to walk. During the night, the Pole came to me and told me that "something bad" was about to happen. That they had taken people to dig a pit. I ran back in the direction of the ghetto to try to rescue my wife and two other children who were there.

When I reached the railway crossing, I met several Jews who had fled the ghetto. They told me not to go into the fire, but to return to the girl, as I would be unable to help at all in the ghetto. I was torn in two. I did not know what to do. If I were to return to the ghetto and be lost with my wife and two children what would happen to the girl. If I were to go to the girl, perhaps I could save her and remain alive. I returned to my daughter.

The Pole treated us well, but was afraid to keep us as this would be dangerous both for us and for him. I took the child and went towards the village of Zalistitz and entered the nearby forest, but the child did not want to stay there. That night we came to the home of Gentile acquaintances who gave us food, but were not prepared to hide us. They were afraid. One said to me : "Hitler will destroy all the Jews. Go back to the ghetto and rest together with all your family in one grave."

I roamed around with the child without sleep and without rest.



## THE BITTER END

### Eva Tuzhinska Trauenstein

On March 11, 1940 I received work at Pharmacy No. 8 in Rozhishch. This was under the Soviet regime and again it seemed as though we were quite settled. I could keep the family modestly with my salary. My husband, too, received work as a bookkeeper in a restaurant. Our son, Lunek, five years old and developed beyond his age, started studying with a private tutor.

One evening, I was sent for to come to the police station where a policeman told me that I was to submit details to the NKVD of what went on at the pharmacy. The policeman, whose pistol was lying on the table in front of him so that I should understand the hint, added that things would not be good if I did not fill this role and did not keep what I was doing secret.

I returned home broken. They wanted to force me to be an informer. A few times, I was forced by threats to come to the police station late at night. I was very frightened, but they did not manage to get anything out of me. Finally, the rude policeman started cursing and insulting me, spat on the floor and threw me out of the room.

One morning, a woman came to the pharmacy weeping bitterly and asked for nitroglycerine for her husband who was very ill. This medicine had been out of stock for some time, and without knowing who her husband was, I decided to travel to the distant Lvov against the advice of the manager of the pharmacy and contrary to my husband's wishes, and in spite of the difficulties involved in travel in those days, to try to obtain the medicine and save the patient.

I learned afterwards that the patient was a Pole, Dobrovolski, who raised pigs and earned very little.

That very evening I went by train to Lvov, and with great effort I obtained the medicine and returned to Rozhishch, arriving at four in the morning. I brought the medicine to the patient who lay in bed, mortally ill.

A few days afterwards an old man, tall and toothless except for one tooth, prominent in his upper jaw, entered the pharmacy, gave me his hand and said, "Thank you from the bottom of my heart. I will never forget what you did for me. I will try to pay you back for that."

At the time I didn't attribute any importance to what he said, however I quickly found out how fateful this event was to prove to be.

On June 21, 1940 bombs fell. A new war had broken out between Germany and Russia. When, two days later Germans appeared on the streets, we were all overcome with fear. Our friends advised us to flee to the USSR, but my husband, my mother and I too, were afraid of suffering and starvation and we didn't

**Eva Tuzhinska Trauenstein** — a pharmacist from Galicia who had escaped with her family on the approach of the Germans, and who, after much suffering reached Rozhishch, where her uncle worked as a pharmacist. Here, under the Soviet regime, she received work in a pharmacy. Her story is registered in Yad V'Shem in Jerusalem. The following is the section of it dealing with her sojourn in Rozhishch.

have the strength to start wandering again. We decided to remain in Rozhishch.

On the third day of the German occupation, the pharmacy was re-opened. At noon that day, a tall German in uniform entered. I stood in panic. It seemed that his face was familiar, but I couldn't place it. Suddenly, he opened his mouth. I saw the one tooth, prominent on his upper jaw. I knew this was the husband of the woman who had so desperately cried for help. He spoke to me in German and told me not to be afraid, that he had come to tell me that he would keep his promise, as I had rescued him from death. He said I was to come to him should I be in distress. His name was Forst and it turned that he was Folksdeutsch and was now the district commandant (Kreisleiter).

From time to time shooting was heard in the streets. An SS man occasionally came into the shop ordering us to give him eggs, eau de cologne and other goods and he would say in faltering Polish that people would be taken away to do forced labour, that things would be very bad, but only for the Jews. His words rang in my ears incessantly.

One day two Germans burst into our house shouting, "Where are the men?" We replied that they had run away a long time ago and that we were Polish. My husband was sitting in his hiding place all this time. It became more and more difficult to obtain food.

Rumours started reaching us that all the Jews were going to be concentrated in one part of the town, in a ghetto. The Nazis made searches, expropriating furs, valuables and shoe leather, and afterwards an order was issued to move to the ghetto within two hours. Everyone was permitted to take with him as many clothes and other articles as he could carry. Nothing more. We took what we could and my husband, my mother, my son and I arrived at the ghetto gate.

We saw German soldiers beating, kicking and torturing the Jews as they arrived. I was overcome with terror that one of my family would be hurt. Then I saw Forst on horseback, looking at us. I don't know how it happened, but we passed through the gate without being touched by the German soldiers.

We entered the small house to which we were allocated. It had one room and a kitchen and was crowded with people. There wasn't even room to stand up. My mother cried. My husband and I stood up the whole night, leaning on the wall. We eventually were given a room in the building where the Judenrat was located. Here too, several families lived, but nonetheless the crowding was less intense.

I was ordered to go back to work in the pharmacy. Every day I walked the long road from the ghetto to the town, dressed in my coat with its yellow patch. In the evening I would return with baskets laden with food and we would distribute it among all the "residents" of the room, more than twenty people, not counting the children. Smuggling food in was dangerous and difficult. Once



Eva Tuzhinska-Trauenstein

Forst came to the ghetto. He gave us a loaf of bread and some sugar. Sometimes he would visit the pharmacy as well, and he always brought some foodstuffs with him.

From time to time the Judenrat was ordered to provide people to be sent to "labour", however, many did not return and the rumour was that they had been shot and killed. I decided to take my mother and son out of the ghetto and to hide them in the pharmacy. Mother left the ghetto with a group of women sweeping the streets, and we smuggled my son out after dark under the barbed wire fence. Miraculously, he was not shot at. I returned to the ghetto each evening with my husband.

The Judenrat was fined for not having supplied the required quota of people for work. The sum was enormous, and the Jews, in despair, gave their last resources. In the meanwhile, the Germans had taken the members of the Judenrat hostage as a guarantee that the sum would be found. Among those being led away I recognized Spector, Bruner, Klimbord and Kleisman. At the end of the file was my husband, who was not a member of the Judenrat, but had been working in their office by chance. He was taken together with the rest.



The Nazis raised the sum of the "contribution", and demanded a large quantity of shoe leather and goods. I ran to the district commandant to try to have my husband released, but could not find him. I went to the new Judenrat, but they told me that they must try to liberate all their members and not just my husband.

I even managed to get into the basement of the jail and to talk with my husband. Days of great tension passed. The money and the gold were found. On August 10, 1942, they managed to bring the required quantity of leather from the surrounding villages.

At the police station I was told that my husband and all the prisoners would be released the following day. However the next day I learned that all of them had been shot. And my husband along with all the rest.

"You no longer have a father," I told my son. He did not cry. He said, "Just you and me, me and you, are left in this world." And the boy, aged six and a half, threw himself on my neck.

Broken-hearted and in despair, I ran to the police and although it was forbidden for me to enter, they could not hold me back. I asked that they at least release my husband's body to me so that I could bury him. But they refused telling me that in another few days everything would be over.

The following day a German came to the pharmacy, and asked for a medicine for the police commander. He told me that the commander had extracted the gold teeth from the mouths of the members of the Judenrat, and was hurt while extracting a full set of gold teeth which he found on the upper jaw of one of them. The bottle of medicine fell out of my hands. My husband had a full set of gold upper teeth.

August 20th, 1942 — 2:00 a.m. I awoke to the sound of people walking. I went to the window and saw a long, long line of figures plodding ahead. In the dark I could not ascertain whether they were soldiers or civilians. The "walk" lasted a long time, and with the light of morning I recognized the Jews of the ghetto walking with their children, with pickaxes and small spades in their hands, walking quietly — for that was the order. My blood froze at this sight. At 3:30 a.m., the walk ended and in about an hour the sound of machine gun fire reached my ears. At 11 a.m. I saw some eight or ten trucks coming from the direction of the ghetto, loaded with clothing and shoes.

When Forst came to the pharmacy that day he asked me why I was not in the ghetto with all my family. I replied that although I had been married to a Jew, I was not a Jewess. I don't know where I found the strength to make that reply with such calm and assurance. My mother and son were hidden in the basement and from time to time I brought them bread and tea. They sat in the dark, unable to move.

The following day a German came to take me in a wagon to Lutsk to buy more medicines for the pharmacy. When we had gone a few kilometers out of town, I saw a long hillock of ash at the roadside. I heard sighs of people and I saw the earth of the hillock shudder...

The German who was with me in the cart said, "The Jews of the ghetto were exterminated here. They are still sighing, gasping and moving in their places."

Terrible days passed. I was strenuously interrogated about my son. I claimed that he was not Jewish, that his real father was a Christian.

On December 22, Forst came to me in secret and told me that he had been thinking of how to repay me for having saved his life. He said that the time had now come. "On December 26th, they are going to kill your son. Save yourself, get out of here."

He prepared a cart for us and on the evening of December 24th, we left Rozhishch to start on a new road of tribulations.

On 10 Elul, towards the end of August, 1942, the Rozhishch ghetto was annihilated and with it, almost its entire Jewish population. Those escaping this fate were few, and had done so under extraordinary circumstances. There were the few who were serving in the Red Army or the Polish Free Army which was organized in Russia, and those whose escape had been a matter of mere chance, as in the cases of Zvi Roiter, Avraham Prigal, Berl Schneider, Faige Sher and some others. After the ghetto had been destroyed those few individuals who remained had nowhere to go, no sources of sustenance, and were in constant search for shelter of the most rudimentary nature. They were constantly being hunted like wild animals by the local Ukrainians as well as by the dreaded Nazis. Their lives became one series of fear, degradation, humiliation, dread, anguish and sheer physical danger. Those who managed to survive did so because of their strong desire to remain alive, and they were sometimes assisted by those few among the local Gentiles who were willing to help them. They became nomads of the desolation which was Poland under Nazi occupation, fleeing from one hideout to the next like hunted animals.

## THE LAST KOL NIDRE IN TROCHIMBROD

**Avraham Prigal** — As Yom Kippur approached, my parents decided to come out of our hiding place in the woods and to go and pray at the Trochimbrod Synagogue come what may. The ghetto in Trochimbrod had not yet been destroyed. We arrived at the Synagogue shortly before Kol Nidre and were received unwillingly by the local Jews. They feared that their fate would be endangered by the coming of so many Jews from their various hiding places to the town. All of whom had felt the need to be united with Jews on this solemn occasion.

**Zvi Roiter** — The Yom Kippur sermon, given by Shimon the Shochet was "May we not go like lambs to the slaughter. May there still be some who will rise up."

Suddenly, a girl was heard to shout, "Jews, the Germans have surrounded us." Panic followed, and people started scattering in all directions. Shortly afterwards they returned to the Synagogue, as there were no Germans in the vicinity. It had been a false alarm.

**Avraham** — That night we saw that the town had been surrounded by Germans and their Ukrainian assistants, My parents told me, my brother, and Zvi to run away. We had just left the yard when my brother was hit with a bullet which tore the flesh from his arm.

The following morning German and Ukrainian policemen came and took a group of several tens of people. I was among the group. We were given shovels and led to a spot at a distance from the town. A German drew the hole which we were to dig.

While we were being led away, one boy tried to organize resistance. He told us that when the Germans ordered us to dig, we should resist. When the order was given, this boy did not dig, but raised his pickaxe, hit the policeman in the face with it and downed him. He took the policeman's rifle away from him and shot at a German policeman on horseback. Great confusion ensued, with Germans, Jews and Ukrainians all mixed together. This prevented the Germans with machine guns from firing into the group.

**Zvi** — We fled in the direction of the forest, with some forty of the fifty people in the group reaching it. The boy who had sparked the rebellion was killed before reaching safety. But thanks to his act of bravery, some forty people who had already dug graves for themselves were saved.

## IN HIDING

### Zvi Roiter



At night, we managed to reach the fields, where we paid a Gentile of our acquaintance to take us hidden in a hay-filled wagon to the village of Olyshkevitsch. We stole into the hay in a barn. Towards morning, we were discovered by a servant. The shock was so great that I was unable to speak. The servant approached me, and left. Shortly afterwards he returned to the hayloft bringing with him my sister, Mindel, who fainted on seeing me. By sheer chance, we had arrived at the place where Kola had found safety for Mindel.

When Kola, our Ukrainian friend, had found that he was no longer able to keep my sister safely at his home, he had brought her to the Soltys (elder) of the village, a German, and had paid him some of the money we had given him so that the elder would keep Mindel safely.



It took me six days to recover from the shock. We were now three, Avraham, Mindel and myself. One Sunday morning we heard shots. Two wagonloads of Ukrainians entered the farmyard and told the Soltys that they had heard that he was sheltering Jews. At the time we were hiding in a hole in the yard which the servant had covered with garbage. The owner plied his "visitors" with drink until they became quite drunk, after which they made a perfunctory examination of the hay loft, and convinced that no Jews were there, left the farm. We later learned that Kola had been among them, and that it had been he who had fired the shots before entering the yard, with the intention of giving us a warning signal. This hideout, we then realized, had become dangerous both for us and the owner, and we departed to look for another shelter.

We returned to our former home, which was now occupied by Ukrainians, whom we knew to be Jew-haters. However, we persuaded them to accept payment to hide us in a pit under their floor. We remained there for about two weeks until we overheard the owner plotting to kill us, and so at night we ran away, looking for still another shelter.

We went to the village of Kirilucha, where the Ukrainians were reputed to treat Jews well. There we went to the home of an acquaintance who was pleased to learn that we were still alive. He agreed to provide a hiding place for my sister. It later turned out that hiding in his home was a "German deserter". This "German deserter" was Baruch Kleinman, a Jew from Katovitz, and he is now my brother-in-law, married to my sister Mindel.

Avraham and I moved on through various places where, here we were given food, there shelter, all in exchange for payment, until we came to a Polish village where there were partisans. Here we cooperated with the Poles in their revenge actions against the Germans. It was here too that I learned my mother's fate. A Ukrainian who had agreed to hide her for payment, took the money and her belongings and then killed her in a field.

And so the years passed, with our moving from one shelter to the other. Finally, the Red Army defeated the Germans and I returned to Rozhishch. I, together with another few boys enlisted in the National Guard.

A group of seven of us who had still been children when the Nazis came, formed a revenge organization. We were encouraged by Bukin, a Jew from Kiev who was the deputy commander of Rozhishch. With his informal approval we borrowed horses from the NKVD, and at nights we would hound those whom we knew had been especially vicious to the Jews, burning their houses and forcing them into hiding. Later, the government put a stop to these activities, having their own means of dealing with the nationalists and collaborators.



## WANDERING

**Zipporah Rosen (Faige Sher)**

When the ghetto was destroyed, I was working together with my daughter Rachel and my seven year old son, Kuni, gathering turf which was being dried and sent to Germany as heating fuel. One day the Soltys of the village in which we were working ordered all the Jews to gather together in one house. Immediately afterwards a truck filled with German and Ukrainian policemen arrived. We realized that destruction was in the offing, as there had already been rumours of the liquidation of Jewish communities in the surrounding area. When I saw the trucks approach, I called to the two children to quickly hide in the grain fields, where I, too, hid. When the trucks with the murderers had passed, I came out of hiding in shock and started running through the night looking for my children. The next morning I found Rachel near the village dairy, but Kuni, aged seven, was nowhere. He had been taken by the murderers.

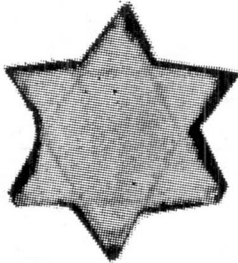
Now our period of wandering began. Most of the Gentiles did not want to give us shelter or food. Most of them chased, threatened, and murdered Jews hiding in the fields or the woods. But there were a few, who despite the great risk and self-sacrifice sometimes involved helped as much as they could. We suffered many disappointments. Former "friends" turned their backs on us, but we did find encouragement here and there. The Seventh Day Adventists, generally speaking, were sympathetic towards us and gave us help, as did those with a communist past, who opposed the Nazis with all their hearts.

With the assistance of these few sympathetic Gentiles, we were able to manage to survive, sometimes hiding in the granary of one farm, sometimes in the forest, sometimes elsewhere, always moving when it was suspected that the Germans had learned of our hiding places. When we had no shelter, we slept in the fields. We would steal out at nights and forage a few vegetables from gardens. This was our only source of food. We were afraid to pump water from the wells for fear that the creaking of the wheels would give us away.

While we were staying in the fields outside the village of Libtsch, sleeping among the bushes, the German and Ukrainian policemen conducted searches by torchlight at night. We would lean as close as possible to the trees without moving. This was hard in the fierce cold and snow of the winter, without warm clothing or shoes.

For nearly three years we lived like animals, chased by hunters, without clothes, without shoes, without the possibility of washing, without the hope that this nightmare would ever end.

Finally after the war, I was able to renew communication with members of my family who had emigrated from Poland before the war; with my mother and sister and brother in the United States and





with my brothers in Brazil and in Eretz Israel. My brother, Avner Rachmieli, was at that time a soldier in the Jewish Brigade serving in Italy. He sent people to bring us from Poland to Austria and from Austria to Italy. From Naples he put us on an "illegal immigration" ship which brought us finally to Eretz Israel.

## PERSECUTION BY UKRAINIANS

### Sarah Zuckerman

My mother, who in the days of the ghetto worked as a cook for the Germans in charge of roadworks, was warned by a slightly human German that the ghetto was about to be annihilated. Therefore she, my brother Asher and my cousin Sarah and I fled to the Ouzhovo forest where many Jews were in hiding, among them a couple, the Baumels. This couple had given their small daughter to a Polish family for safe-keeping. She lives with them to this day, her parents having been killed in the forest.

The Ukrainians used to chase the escaping Jews, take their clothing and valuables from them and afterwards stab them to death or turn them over to the Germans. The Jews dispersed in small groups, looking for ways of joining the Jewish partisans known to be in the region. My brother, Asher, also joined them. Mother and I hid in the barn of a Pole, whom we paid with clothing. I would knit for his family in the winter, and mother worked in their fields in exchange for a little food.

When the struggle between the nationalist Ukrainians and the Poles started, owners of Polish farms would flee to town for safety at night, leaving us and other Jews to guard the farm and defend it in case of attack. One of the village people worked as a translator for the Germans, and he would bring us information of what was about to happen. Therefore, whenever a roundup was in the offing, we were able to find another hiding place for that particular day. And so we managed to remain alive.



## MY SISTER CHARNA

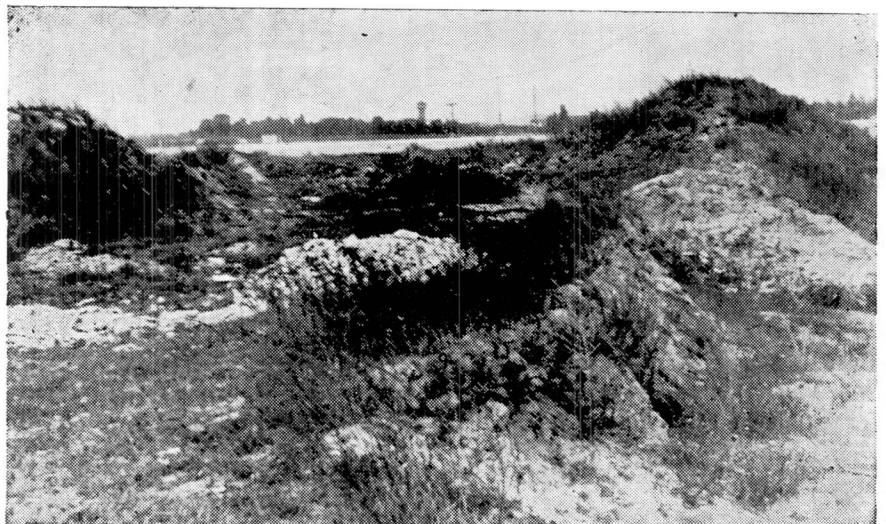
### Shoshana Hadash

After my parents had been killed, only I and my older sister, Charna, who looked after me and kept me going, remained. We had lost all that was dear to us and continued living without hope. We looked for hiding places among the bushes in the forests. At night we would go foraging for a little food. We suffered starvation. The cold of winter was very hard on us. We would hide in piles of hay, hunted by both Germans and Ukrainians.

We continued existing in this way for more than two years, suffering without hope, because we fiercely wanted to remain alive. And indeed, we did live to see the Soviets return, and we believed that the end of our troubles and tribulations had come. But fate was cruel to us.

After the return of the Russians, Charna went to retrieve the family belongings from the Ukrainian family friend with whom they had been entrusted. The Ukrainian refused to return them, and apprehensive of further claims, cold-bloodedly murdered my sister Charna.

Common grave of the Jews of Rozhishch shot to their death, a few kilometers outside of town.



# The Extermination of the Jews in the Villages

## KOPACHIVKE

By Moshe Rabin and a lady survivor

**Moshe Rabin** — The small Jewish community of Kopachivke consisted of some eighty families; merchants, storekeepers, small craftsmen, and even some landowners. They had a Rabbi, a shochet, and a local synagogue. The relations between the Jews and the local Gentile population, which was mostly Polish, had been very good until the outbreak of the war. In the days of the Soviets, the shops were all expropriated and the Jews became civil servants on a monthly salary.

**Lady survivor** — On the first day that the Germans came to our village, they came to our home, took my father and two other men and killed them beside the windmill. Later, we learned that before being shot they had been forced to dig themselves a pit with their own hands. All the Jews of Kopachivke ran away from their homes into the forest nearby.

The Ukrainians, who had been promised independence by the Germans, surrounded the forest, and started shooting in all directions, killing most of the Jews. Those who remained alive were afterwards sent to work by the village's Judenrat felling trees, digging pits and doing other physical labour. Their supervisors, the Volksdeutsche and the Ukrainians, tortured them and beat them mercilessly.

My sister had left all her property with a rich Pole who had been friendly with our family. When she came out of hiding to ask him for bread, he did give her and her two children shelter in his cowshed for about ten days. Then he went to the Gestapo telling them that Jews had hidden at his farm and were refusing to leave. Ukrainians came and killed them.

The fate of the Jews who had lived in the villages near Rozhishch differed only in details from that of the Rozhishch Jews.



## CHETVERTNIA

Fanya Rosenblatt

Our village was not far from Rozhishch. When the Germans came, they rounded up the Jews from a number of villages in the area and set up a ghetto there. The ghetto was destroyed on October 10, 1942. I am the only survivor of the Chetvertnia ghetto.

On the morning of October 10th, 1942, when my mother woke up, she noticed that policemen were stationed at the entrance to all the houses. The meaning of this was clear to her, and she woke



Fanya Rosenblat.

us all up. My parents decided to hide me, and convinced me to get inside the sofa which they covered with some cushions. A few moments later, the police entered the house and took everyone out.

Four policemen then combed the house, and of course they found me. The older man among them, convinced the three young policemen to let me go. He told me where the Germans were and advised me to go in the opposite direction.

When I reached the fields, I saw two small girls leading cows to pasture. I picked up a stick and joined them. In this way I crossed the village to the pastures where there were bushes. I sat under the bushes immersed in thought. I was alone, aged 18, with no means of support, and I would have to hide out like a hunted animal. This was the longest day of my life.

As I was sitting, sunk in thought, a Ukrainian Seventh Day Adventist came by, gave me a slice of bread and his hand-woven blanket, and immediately left me. Seventh Day Adventists, too, were not particularly kosher in the eyes of the Germans, because of their reputation of being sympathetic to the Jews.

Previously, in the ghetto, one of the guards had told me that if ever anything should happen, I could turn to him, and perhaps he would be able to help me. As he was known as a drunkard and a brute, and because he had been given the job of guarding the Jews, I had not taken his offer very seriously. But in this moment of despair, I thought of him. Then I knew exactly what I was going to do. I would go to him at nightfall. He would surely turn me over to the Germans, and that was exactly what I wanted at that point. I saw no other way out.

When night came, I put the blanket I had been given over my head, peasant style, and started towards Korney's (his name). Suddenly, I saw a figure advancing towards me. It was Korney. He had been given the task of guarding the property left behind by the Jews. He told me to sit in the bushes until his watch was over when he would come to take me. He took off his fur coat and gave it to me to wear. When he came to fetch me he told me that no one must know that I was with him, and that although he would hide me in his home, he would not even tell his wife and children about me.

He put me in his attic and brought me food and drink every day. He used various pretexts to obtain the food from his neighbours and friends so that he need not take it from his home thus arousing his family's suspicions. As he was a type people feared, he always got what he wanted. I, therefore, had an abundance of food.

One day, he told me he had a good plan for me. He had learned that someone in the neighbouring village had found a girl's passport. The man had agreed to sell it to Korney. As my family had owned a large store, Korney felt that they must have cached something away with someone. We decided to restore some of my family's property in order to pay for the passport.

We waited until night, and left together, I, with my blanket on my head. I went to the village priest, who was very surprised to see me, and who ordered that everything be returned to me. Only in one place did I meet with an absolute refusal. But Korney dealt with that, and my property was restored.

I didn't sleep all that night, wondering whether Korney would succeed in obtaining my document for me. The following morning he brought me the passport. My new name was Nina Fumin. The document bore no photograph and was signed with a thumb impression.

Then Korney unfolded his plan for me. He had an uncle who was a village elder for the Germans in a village some twenty kilometers from Rozhishch. As I didn't look Jewish, he would take me to his uncle, tell him that I was the daughter of his brother who lived in Russia. He would say that I had escaped from a train bringing Russian youth to forced labour in Germany, and that I had made my way to him. As he felt it was unsafe to keep me, for fear that the Germans would question him, he had brought me to his uncle.

To this day, I still wonder why Korney undertook the tremendous risk to help me. I think he regarded it as a challenge which only he was capable of carrying out.

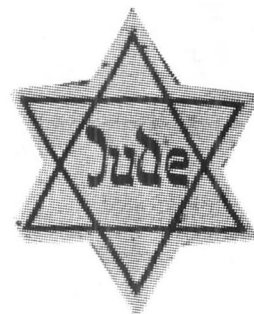
On the way to the village, Korney boned me up on all the family details. My new "aunt and uncle" received me gladly. They were pleased to have a niece, and they needed help on their farm. They congratulated Korney on his good sense at having brought me to them.

Although I knew nothing about farm work, I learned quickly, and when there were things I didn't know, I explained this away by claiming that in Russia we had done things differently.

I continued living with them as their niece, going to church, following all their customs, and being well regarded as a dilligent worker.

The summer of 1943 marked a change in the relations between the Germans and the Ukrainians. The latter having organized into nationalistic bands, which acted against both the Germans and the Soviets, with the aim of establishing an independent Ukraine. The Germans enlisted the Poles in an effort to stop the nationalists, and indescribable chaos ensued, with the Ukrainian bands attacking the Poles at night, butchering entire families with knives and axes. The Poles retaliated by burning Ukrainian villages, killing all who chanced in their paths.

And so again I found myself in hiding in the forest. This time, as a Ukrainian. Shortly thereafter, I went to work as a housemaid for the locally born German, Julius, who was a good friend of my "uncle's." This Julius had been appointed by the Nazis to a high ranking position, and was infamous for his attitude to the Jews. When the Julius family moved to Rovno, they took me with them.





In December, 1943, the Germans were on the verge of defeat at the hands of the advancing Red Army. However, the Germans launched a massive counter-attack. That entire winter battles raged in the region. Everything in sight burned, the woods, the villages. The whole district was like a volcano. It was not until the end of March that the Russians finally took over.

I lost no time in leaving for Rozhishch in search of Jewish survivors. I found a number in one house. Most of them had managed to get to Rozhishch back in December when the Russians had taken control of the eastern banks of the Styr. Many were suffering from typhus. When they heard my story and that I had stayed so long working for the dreaded Julius, they found it hard to believe me, for he had been responsible for terrorizing all the Jews of the area.

Although I survived the war, fate was cruel to Korney on my account. Two Jews had met the Seventh Day Adventist who had given me his blanket on my first day alone. He told them that he had seen Korney with that blanket and had concluded that Korney had killed me. After the German retreat, the two Jews charged Korney with my death. Korney assured them that I was alive, but would not tell them of my whereabouts. The men refused to believe him and threatened to avenge my supposed death. Korney, fearing for his life, joined the Red Army. He was killed on the front during the heavy fighting.

The common grave on the road to Kopachivke for the six thousand Jews of Rozhishch and area murdered by the Nazis in 1942. The memorial was laid in 1945 by a group of survivors.



## BEREZOLUP

### Pnina Koren (Torchiniuk)

I was studying at high school in Lutsk when the Germans came. On the morning of June 22, 1941, I was awakened by a thunderous noise. The town was being bombed. My room-mate and I quickly left our rooms. Our teachers, who were all Soviets, told us to wait to be evacuated, but we preferred to return to our families. I went to my sister Hadassah's home. She lived on the other side of the town. The town was being continually bombed and we were under the impression that the Russians had abandoned the local populace, not even having supplied aerial defence.

My sister, who then was in the later stages of pregnancy, and I decided to make our way to our parents' home in Berezolup. There the Ukrainian nationalists were impatiently awaiting the Germans. Immediately after the conquest, they brought the Germans to our home, and all our valuables were confiscated.

The situation worsened from day to day. We were given all sorts of humiliating work to do. The militia men would say, "Up to now we have worked for you. Now we'll see how you work for us." We were forced to wear yellow patches on our backs and chests.

It was in this period that my sister, Hadassah, moved to her sister-in-law's home in Rozhishch, where she gave birth to a son. Unfortunately, the baby was circumcised.

A forced labour camp was soon set up by the Germans to which they brought Jews from a few surrounding villages. The people were housed in small decrepit huts, five families to a hut. The camp was run by Germans, Folksdeutsche and Jew-hating Ukrainians. Impossible to achieve work norms were established in order to provide an excuse for bestial beatings. The food consisted of 80 grams of bread and potato peel soup daily. After long hours of work, we were made to clean the camp in the evenings. When the commandant felt like a little amusement, he would order one of the prisoners to play the accordion, and we were forced to dance with the tools in our hands. This was a degrading, shocking and most painful experience. Particularly since there was no way whatsoever to stand up against it.

From time to time the camp lieutenant would issue a demand for valuables. Once, when all our sources of valuables had run out, he made a further demand for cloth and gold rings. My uncle, Shmuel Oxman, a very likable man with a lot of influence, went to the Lutsk ghetto to ask for help there. Taking our difficult circumstances into consideration, they gave him the things. My uncle was sure that now the Germans would stop harrassing us so much.

This matter of the demands, apparently reached the lieutenant's superiors, and he was reprimanded. Smarting at the rebuke, he called for my uncle and another man, ordered them to dig a hole, and when they had finished, he shot and killed them.



We existed with no connection with the outside world. From the time of my uncle's death, even the trips to the ghetto stopped. We lived in fear and anguish. Some Ukrainians who had known us previously provided us with a little encouragement in the form of food which they sneaked into the camp.

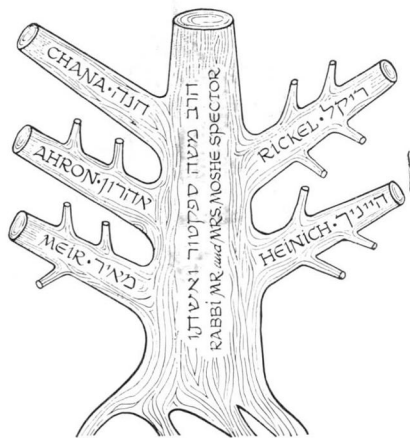
One day, I saw a truck loaded with women and children come from the camp and thought that I recognized my sisters in it. These were the most difficult moments of my life. I started towards the camp. Half-way there, I met my father. He said that my sisters Shoshana and Hadassah had probably hidden in the camp with a Seventh Day Adventist family. That night we found shelter in a stable and at dawn, I went to look for my mother who had the baby and my younger sister Shulamith. After many hours of searching I managed to find them. Afterwards I met my two other sisters on their way to the forest to look for a hide-out.

On my way back to father, I passed by our house, which was a shambles. I took some cloth and rings which mother had cached away, and continued to where my grandparents were living. Because their house was at some distance from the main road, the murderers had not found them. I begged them to come with me to the forest. They refused to move. They didn't want to start a new life of wandering without a future at their advanced age. Grandfather said, "You are a young girl and can be saved. Run away from here quickly." I left them with a broken heart. The following morning from the field where I was hiding I saw a truck approach the house and take my grandparents away.

I returned to father, and we went into hiding in bunkers which had remained in the forest from the First World War. My father had always been a proud man, with hopes, dreams and visions. Now he felt himself degraded, oppressed and desparate. On the other hand, he often tried to awaken the faith in us that the enlightened world and the Jews in Eretz Israel would not abandon us.

Throughout the time we were in hiding in the forest, we were given help in the form of food or clothing by a few Gentiles, sometimes at great risk to themselves. One day while foraging for food, we met a boy from Rozhishch. He was very depressed, a stranger in the area, and he had no place to hide. We brought him back to the granary where we were hiding at the time. When the farmer's wife brought us our food, and saw the boy, she started crying that we had brought her a stranger and another man, and that if she were to be caught, she would pay with her life. The youth left the attic, and started wandering around the village in the light of day. He said that he no longer had anything to lose. And, indeed, two days after this he was killed by the militia.

Slowly, we were overtaken by disasters. In one search, the militia found ten Jews, including my uncle, aunt and their two children and killed them. We started looking for other places of shelter after this. It was bitter cold, and Hadassah's baby never stopped crying. We were afraid he would give us away. We had



The Family Tree of Rabbi Moshe'le Spector. None survived, a fate common to most Jewish families.

no alternative but to return to the forest. On the very day of our return, the militia raided the forest. They found the opening to our bunker and ordered us to come outside. On hearing our name, they told us that they had heard that we were "good Jews" and that they would let us go. We were told to go far from the forest because searches were made there from time to time. Apparently the local peasant girls had mentioned our name favourably to the militia men, begging them not to hurt us.

It was clear to us that we would have to find another hiding place. Mother and Shula went to the village until things calmed down. In the meanwhile we were joined by the Spiegel family and three men from Rozhishch. It was decided that until we could organize properly for the winter, we would remain in the forest. My sister, Shoshana and I went out to the village to scavenge food. Because of a snowstorm we could not return to the forest. We separated and agreed to meet in the evening and then to return to the forest.

When I reached Shoshana with the food, she broke into tears and said that we no longer had anywhere to go back to. She had just been informed that there had been another raid in the forest and that everyone had been killed. I begged her to return with me to the forest to bury them, but she insisted that the Germans were surely in ambush awaiting the return of the other members of the family. She insisted we had better go to tell mother what had happened.

We had great trouble with Hadassah's baby. His fingers and toes froze. He cried a lot. We wandered from place to place, looking for shelter. No one would help us because they were afraid the baby's crying would give them away. After wandering around in this manner for about a month, Mother and Shoshana left the beautiful baby boy, aged one year and two months, asleep on the doorstep of a farm. A short time later, he was taken inside. But neighbours started gossiping about the baby and the matter reached the militia. The woman, on being interrogated, insisted the baby was the son of relatives and that she wanted to adopt him. They were not convinced, and finding the baby had been circumcised, snatched him out of her arms. He was shot just outside the farmhouse.

Of our entire family, only mother, Shula and I survived the holocaust.



# The Extermination of the Jews in the Villages

## KOPACHIVKE

By Moshe Rabin and a lady survivor

**Moshe Rabin** — The small Jewish community of Kopachivke consisted of some eighty families; merchants, storekeepers, small craftsmen, and even some landowners. They had a Rabbi, a shochet, and a local synagogue. The relations between the Jews and the local Gentile population, which was mostly Polish, had been very good until the outbreak of the war. In the days of the Soviets, the shops were all expropriated and the Jews became civil servants on a monthly salary.

**Lady survivor** — On the first day that the Germans came to our village, they came to our home, took my father and two other men and killed them beside the windmill. Later, we learned that before being shot they had been forced to dig themselves a pit with their own hands. All the Jews of Kopachivke ran away from their homes into the forest nearby.

The Ukrainians, who had been promised independence by the Germans, surrounded the forest, and started shooting in all directions, killing most of the Jews. Those who remained alive were afterwards sent to work by the village's Judenrat felling trees, digging pits and doing other physical labour. Their supervisors, the Volksdeutsche and the Ukrainians, tortured them and beat them mercilessly.

My sister had left all her property with a rich Pole who had been friendly with our family. When she came out of hiding to ask him for bread, he did give her and her two children shelter in his cowshed for about ten days. Then he went to the Gestapo telling them that Jews had hidden at his farm and were refusing to leave. Ukrainians came and killed them.

The fate of the Jews who had lived in the villages near Rozhishch differed only in details from that of the Rozhishch Jews.



## CHETVERTNIA

Fanya Rosenblatt

Our village was not far from Rozhishch. When the Germans came, they rounded up the Jews from a number of villages in the area and set up a ghetto there. The ghetto was destroyed on October 10, 1942. I am the only survivor of the Chetvertnia ghetto.

On the morning of October 10th, 1942, when my mother woke up, she noticed that policemen were stationed at the entrance to all the houses. The meaning of this was clear to her, and she woke





Fanya Rosenblat.

us all up. My parents decided to hide me, and convinced me to get inside the sofa which they covered with some cushions. A few moments later, the police entered the house and took everyone out.

Four policemen then combed the house, and of course they found me. The older man among them, convinced the three young policemen to let me go. He told me where the Germans were and advised me to go in the opposite direction.

When I reached the fields, I saw two small girls leading cows to pasture. I picked up a stick and joined them. In this way I crossed the village to the pastures where there were bushes. I sat under the bushes immersed in thought. I was alone, aged 18, with no means of support, and I would have to hide out like a hunted animal. This was the longest day of my life.

As I was sitting, sunk in thought, a Ukrainian Seventh Day Adventist came by, gave me a slice of bread and his hand-woven blanket, and immediately left me. Seventh Day Adventists, too, were not particularly kosher in the eyes of the Germans, because of their reputation of being sympathetic to the Jews.

Previously, in the ghetto, one of the guards had told me that if ever anything should happen, I could turn to him, and perhaps he would be able to help me. As he was known as a drunkard and a brute, and because he had been given the job of guarding the Jews, I had not taken his offer very seriously. But in this moment of despair, I thought of him. Then I knew exactly what I was going to do. I would go to him at nightfall. He would surely turn me over to the Germans, and that was exactly what I wanted at that point. I saw no other way out.

When night came, I put the blanket I had been given over my head, peasant style, and started towards Korney's (his name). Suddenly, I saw a figure advancing towards me. It was Korney. He had been given the task of guarding the property left behind by the Jews. He told me to sit in the bushes until his watch was over when he would come to take me. He took off his fur coat and gave it to me to wear. When he came to fetch me he told me that no one must know that I was with him, and that although he would hide me in his home, he would not even tell his wife and children about me.

He put me in his attic and brought me food and drink every day. He used various pretexts to obtain the food from his neighbours and friends so that he need not take it from his home thus arousing his family's suspicions. As he was a type people feared, he always got what he wanted. I, therefore, had an abundance of food.

One day, he told me he had a good plan for me. He had learned that someone in the neighbouring village had found a girl's passport. The man had agreed to sell it to Korney. As my family had owned a large store, Korney felt that they must have cached something away with someone. We decided to restore some of my family's property in order to pay for the passport.

We waited until night, and left together, I, with my blanket on my head. I went to the village priest, who was very surprised to see me, and who ordered that everything be returned to me. Only in one place did I meet with an absolute refusal. But Korney dealt with that, and my property was restored.

I didn't sleep all that night, wondering whether Korney would succeed in obtaining my document for me. The following morning he brought me the passport. My new name was Nina Fumin. The document bore no photograph and was signed with a thumb impression.

Then Korney unfolded his plan for me. He had an uncle who was a village elder for the Germans in a village some twenty kilometers from Rozhishch. As I didn't look Jewish, he would take me to his uncle, tell him that I was the daughter of his brother who lived in Russia. He would say that I had escaped from a train bringing Russian youth to forced labour in Germany, and that I had made my way to him. As he felt it was unsafe to keep me, for fear that the Germans would question him, he had brought me to his uncle.

To this day, I still wonder why Korney undertook the tremendous risk to help me. I think he regarded it as a challenge which only he was capable of carrying out.

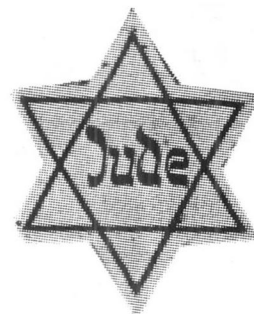
On the way to the village, Korney boned me up on all the family details. My new "aunt and uncle" received me gladly. They were pleased to have a niece, and they needed help on their farm. They congratulated Korney on his good sense at having brought me to them.

Although I knew nothing about farm work, I learned quickly, and when there were things I didn't know, I explained this away by claiming that in Russia we had done things differently.

I continued living with them as their niece, going to church, following all their customs, and being well regarded as a dilligent worker.

The summer of 1943 marked a change in the relations between the Germans and the Ukrainians. The latter having organized into nationalistic bands, which acted against both the Germans and the Soviets, with the aim of establishing an independent Ukraine. The Germans enlisted the Poles in an effort to stop the nationalists, and indescribable chaos ensued, with the Ukrainian bands attacking the Poles at night, butchering entire families with knives and axes. The Poles retaliated by burning Ukrainian villages, killing all who chanced in their paths.

And so again I found myself in hiding in the forest. This time, as a Ukrainian. Shortly thereafter, I went to work as a housemaid for the locally born German, Julius, who was a good friend of my "uncle's." This Julius had been appointed by the Nazis to a high ranking position, and was infamous for his attitude to the Jews. When the Julius family moved to Rovno, they took me with them.



In December, 1943, the Germans were on the verge of defeat at the hands of the advancing Red Army. However, the Germans launched a massive counter-attack. That entire winter battles raged in the region. Everything in sight burned, the woods, the villages. The whole district was like a volcano. It was not until the end of March that the Russians finally took over.

I lost no time in leaving for Rozhishch in search of Jewish survivors. I found a number in one house. Most of them had managed to get to Rozhishch back in December when the Russians had taken control of the eastern banks of the Styr. Many were suffering from typhus. When they heard my story and that I had stayed so long working for the dreaded Julius, they found it hard to believe me, for he had been responsible for terrorizing all the Jews of the area.

Although I survived the war, fate was cruel to Korney on my account. Two Jews had met the Seventh Day Adventist who had given me his blanket on my first day alone. He told them that he had seen Korney with that blanket and had concluded that Korney had killed me. After the German retreat, the two Jews charged Korney with my death. Korney assured them that I was alive, but would not tell them of my whereabouts. The men refused to believe him and threatened to avenge my supposed death. Korney, fearing for his life, joined the Red Army. He was killed on the front during the heavy fighting.

The common grave on the road to Kopachivke for the six thousand Jews of Rozhishch and area murdered by the Nazis in 1942. The memorial was laid in 1945 by a group of survivors.



## BEREZOLUP

### Pnina Koren (Torchiniuk)

I was studying at high school in Lutsk when the Germans came. On the morning of June 22, 1941, I was awakened by a thunderous noise. The town was being bombed. My room-mate and I quickly left our rooms. Our teachers, who were all Soviets, told us to wait to be evacuated, but we preferred to return to our families. I went to my sister Hadassah's home. She lived on the other side of the town. The town was being continually bombed and we were under the impression that the Russians had abandoned the local populace, not even having supplied aerial defence.

My sister, who then was in the later stages of pregnancy, and I decided to make our way to our parents' home in Berezolup. There the Ukrainian nationalists were impatiently awaiting the Germans. Immediately after the conquest, they brought the Germans to our home, and all our valuables were confiscated.

The situation worsened from day to day. We were given all sorts of humiliating work to do. The militia men would say, "Up to now we have worked for you. Now we'll see how you work for us." We were forced to wear yellow patches on our backs and chests.

It was in this period that my sister, Hadassah, moved to her sister-in-law's home in Rozhishch, where she gave birth to a son. Unfortunately, the baby was circumcised.

A forced labour camp was soon set up by the Germans to which they brought Jews from a few surrounding villages. The people were housed in small decrepit huts, five families to a hut. The camp was run by Germans, Volksdeutsche and Jew-hating Ukrainians. Impossible to achieve work norms were established in order to provide an excuse for bestial beatings. The food consisted of 80 grams of bread and potato peel soup daily. After long hours of work, we were made to clean the camp in the evenings. When the commandant felt like a little amusement, he would order one of the prisoners to play the accordion, and we were forced to dance with the tools in our hands. This was a degrading, shocking and most painful experience. Particularly since there was no way whatsoever to stand up against it.

From time to time the camp lieutenant would issue a demand for valuables. Once, when all our sources of valuables had run out, he made a further demand for cloth and gold rings. My uncle, Shmuel Oxman, a very likable man with a lot of influence, went to the Lutsk ghetto to ask for help there. Taking our difficult circumstances into consideration, they gave him the things. My uncle was sure that now the Germans would stop harrassing us so much.

This matter of the demands, apparently reached the lieutenant's superiors, and he was reprimanded. Smarting at the rebuke, he called for my uncle and another man, ordered them to dig a hole, and when they had finished, he shot and killed them.



We existed with no connection with the outside world. From the time of my uncle's death, even the trips to the ghetto stopped. We lived in fear and anguish. Some Ukrainians who had known us previously provided us with a little encouragement in the form of food which they sneaked into the camp.

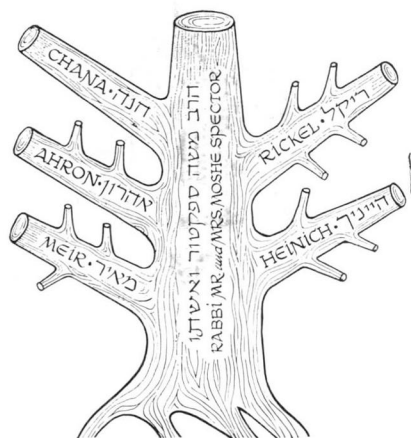
One day, I saw a truck loaded with women and children come from the camp and thought that I recognized my sisters in it. These were the most difficult moments of my life. I started towards the camp. Half-way there, I met my father. He said that my sisters Shoshana and Hadassah had probably hidden in the camp with a Seventh Day Adventist family. That night we found shelter in a stable and at dawn, I went to look for my mother who had the baby and my younger sister Shulamith. After many hours of searching I managed to find them. Afterwards I met my two other sisters on their way to the forest to look for a hide-out.

On my way back to father, I passed by our house, which was a shambles. I took some cloth and rings which mother had cached away, and continued to where my grandparents were living. Because their house was at some distance from the main road, the murderers had not found them. I begged them to come with me to the forest. They refused to move. They didn't want to start a new life of wandering without a future at their advanced age. Grandfather said, "You are a young girl and can be saved. Run away from here quickly." I left them with a broken heart. The following morning from the field where I was hiding I saw a truck approach the house and take my grandparents away.

I returned to father, and we went into hiding in bunkers which had remained in the forest from the First World War. My father had always been a proud man, with hopes, dreams and visions. Now he felt himself degraded, oppressed and desparate. On the other hand, he often tried to awaken the faith in us that the enlightened world and the Jews in Eretz Israel would not abandon us.

Throughout the time we were in hiding in the forest, we were given help in the form of food or clothing by a few Gentiles, sometimes at great risk to themselves. One day while foraging for food, we met a boy from Rozhishch. He was very depressed, a stranger in the area, and he had no place to hide. We brought him back to the granary where we were hiding at the time. When the farmer's wife brought us our food, and saw the boy, she started crying that we had brought her a stranger and another man, and that if she were to be caught, she would pay with her life. The youth left the attic, and started wandering around the village in the light of day. He said that he no longer had anything to lose. And, indeed, two days after this he was killed by the militia.

Slowly, we were overtaken by disasters. In one search, the militia found ten Jews, including my uncle, aunt and their two children and killed them. We started looking for other places of shelter after this. It was bitter cold, and Hadassah's baby never stopped crying. We were afraid he would give us away. We had



The Family Tree of Rabbi Moshe'le Spector. None survived, a fate common to most Jewish families.



no alternative but to return to the forest. On the very day of our return, the militia raided the forest. They found the opening to our bunker and ordered us to come outside. On hearing our name, they told us that they had heard that we were "good Jews" and that they would let us go. We were told to go far from the forest because searches were made there from time to time. Apparently the local peasant girls had mentioned our name favourably to the militia men, begging them not to hurt us.

It was clear to us that we would have to find another hiding place. Mother and Shula went to the village until things calmed down. In the meanwhile we were joined by the Spiegel family and three men from Rozhishch. It was decided that until we could organize properly for the winter, we would remain in the forest. My sister, Shoshana and I went out to the village to scavenge food. Because of a snowstorm we could not return to the forest. We separated and agreed to meet in the evening and then to return to the forest.

When I reached Shoshana with the food, she broke into tears and said that we no longer had anywhere to go back to. She had just been informed that there had been another raid in the forest and that everyone had been killed. I begged her to return with me to the forest to bury them, but she insisted that the Germans were surely in ambush awaiting the return of the other members of the family. She insisted we had better go to tell mother what had happened.

We had great trouble with Hadassah's baby. His fingers and toes froze. He cried a lot. We wandered from place to place, looking for shelter. No one would help us because they were afraid the baby's crying would give them away. After wandering around in this manner for about a month, Mother and Shoshana left the beautiful baby boy, aged one year and two months, asleep on the doorstep of a farm. A short time later, he was taken inside. But neighbours started gossiping about the baby and the matter reached the militia. The woman, on being interrogated, insisted the baby was the son of relatives and that she wanted to adopt him. They were not convinced, and finding the baby had been circumcised, snatched him out of her arms. He was shot just outside the farmhouse.

Of our entire family, only mother, Shula and I survived the holocaust.



# Last Will and Testament

**Zipporah Birman**, a graduate of the Rozhishch HeHalutz HaZair, was active in the Tel Hai Hachshara Kibbutz in Bialistok when that city was captured by the Germans. She was in the resistance movement, and fell in the Bialistok ghetto rebellion in August, 1943. After the war, the archives of the underground were located buried in the earth outside of the ghetto. There, included in a letter addressed "My friends, the Halutzim", her last will and testament was found, in which she wrote:

"There is no alternative, no other way but to die an honourable death together with all the thousands who are going to their death and that without fear.

**We know that the Jewish people will not perish. It will still grow and blossom forth as a nation. It will arise and avenge the spilled blood of the innocent.**

Yes, this is my appeal to you, friends, wherever you may be. You must undertake the absolute debt to avenge us. Not one of you must rest, sleep peacefully at night or find peace of mind during the day. As we, here, are in the shadow of death, so you, there, are the source of revenge for the blood that has been spilled.

Cursed be the reader of these words who suffices with a sigh and afterwards goes back to his daily routine. Cursed be the person for whom it is enough that he drop a tear and cries for our souls.

It is not that which we want. We did not cry even for our parents. We conquered our tears, and looked in silence at the dead bodies of our friends, shot down like dogs.

We call to you for revenge, revenge without mercy, without feeling, without talk of "good" Germans. For a "good" German — an easy death. He will die last, as they promised the Jew who for them was good; thus they should be shot last. This is what all of us demand. This is the will of the people who will perhaps fall tomorrow; who are about to fight with honour and to fall honourably.

**REVENGE!** This is what we demand of you, who did not suffer Hitler's hell. This is something you must do, even should it endanger your lives. Our bones shattered in all of Europe's corners will not rest, our ashes spread throughout the crematoria will not find peace until we are avenged.

Remember; and fulfill our will — your duty."



Zippora Birman.

## 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.

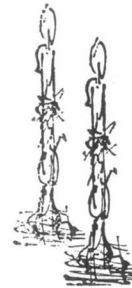
The family's private well which supplied fresh water was in the garden, behind the house. Any passerby who entered Uncle David's house always enjoyed a generous reception there.

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.

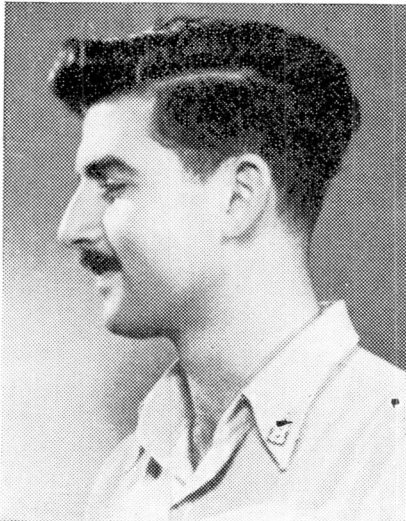
He had a Torah in his home, and on Sabbath and holidays, public prayer was held there, with Jews from the adjoining village of Siltzes joining in, as without them there would be no "minian".

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.

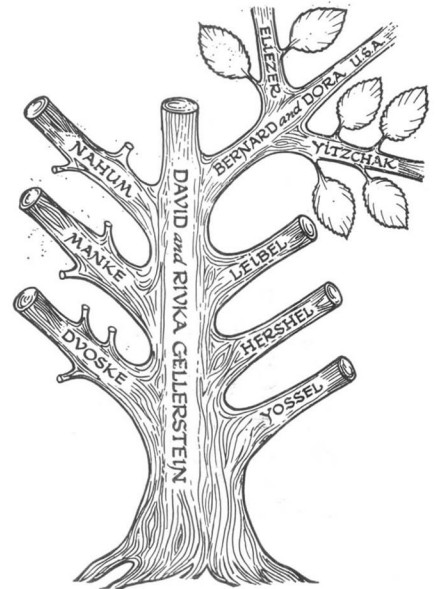
Nachum, the eldest brother, belonged to Brith HeHayal, Berl (Bob) was a member of HeHalutz. Yossel, the third brother belonged to Betar, Hershel to HeHalutz, while the youngest, Leibel'le, the apple of his parents eye, belonged to HaShomer HaZair.

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.

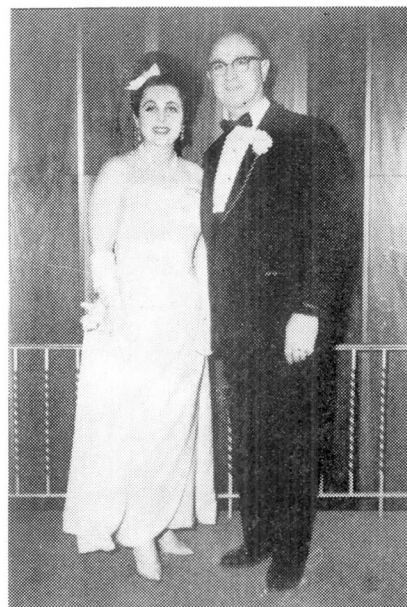
He used to have good ideas that all the pupils liked, but which Rebbe Yona did not. Therefore, the Rebbe called him Toyenu... and when Toyenu and the "bandit'le" (Bunim Melamed) started their tricks, life in the Heder became really fun ..

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 :

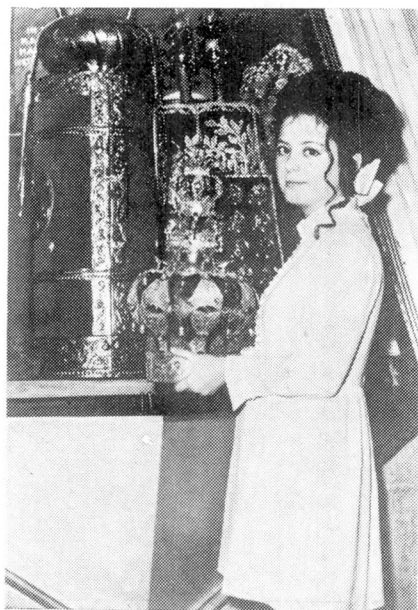


His parents.



Theodore Rayffé and his wife, Leanora.

Their daughter, Shifra.



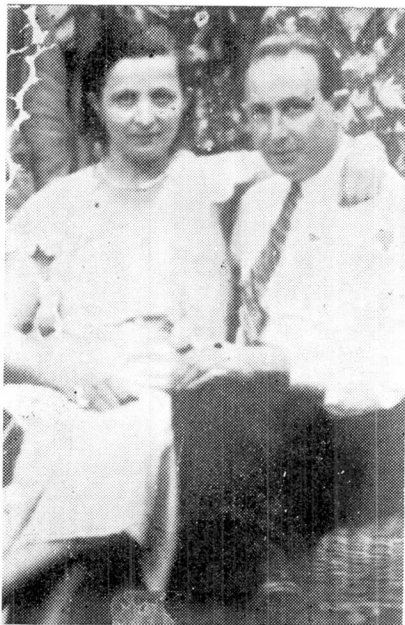
Their daughter, Zahara.



Their son, Salomon Walter.







Leibesh and Malka Royffé

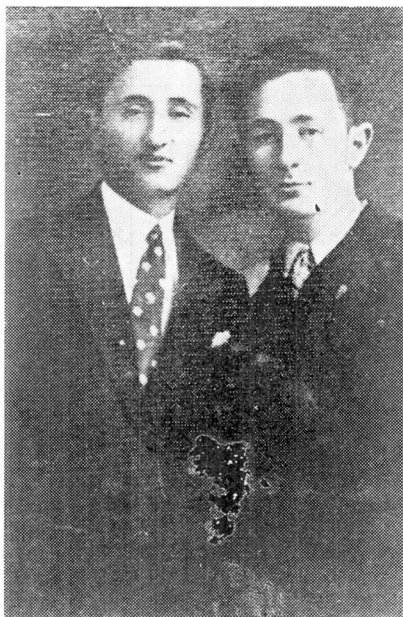
In 1930 his family emigrated to America where he started a new life. His brother Leibish was not permitted entry because he suffered from a lung disease. He remained alone in Rozhishch.

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.

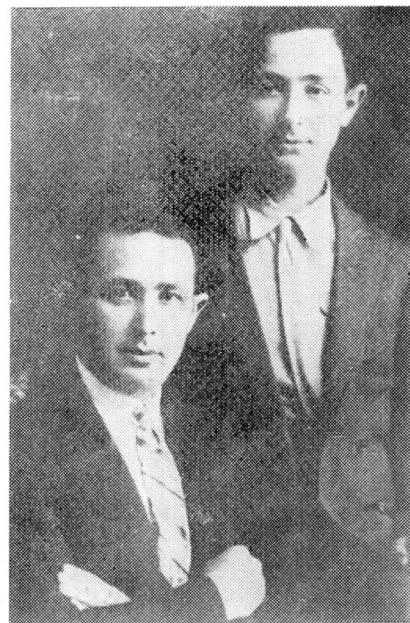
Leibesh and Manya Royffé



Theodore and Shmelik Widra



Theodore and Leibesh



## ROZHISHCHER SOCIETIES

### The Rozhishch Society in Israel

From its small beginnings, the Rozhishch society in Israel has developed into an organization with over 250 members. Its founder was Leah Gavish.

After the Second World War, its membership was augmented by those survivors of the holocaust who managed to reach Israel. Its major activities were the holding of the annual memorial service in memory of the dear ones who had perished in the Holocaust, and a mutual aid benevolent fund which offered financial assistance to members in need in the form of interest free loans.

Later, when contact was established with Rozhishchers in other parts of the world, the organization developed and took on its present dimensions. In consultation with, and through the active



Memorial tablet in honour of Rozhishch martyrs on Har Zion.

cooperation of the Rozhishch committees in the United States, Canada, Brazil and Argentina, the enterprise of purchasing Beth Rozhishch was undertaken.

### BETH ROZHISHCH

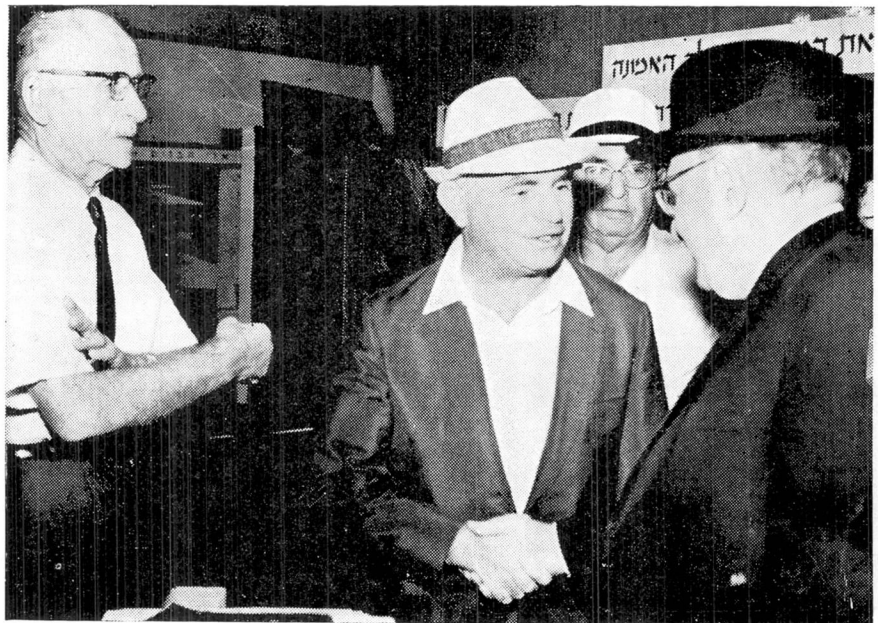
Beth Rozhishch serves as the focal point and the centre of the activities of Rozhishchers both in Israel and abroad. It was purchased in 1961, is well situated in the centre of Tel Aviv, occupying the entire basement floor of a commercial and residential building, and consists of a large assembly hall, a club-room, an office, a kitchen and an outdoor patio.

It was officially opened at a festive ceremony attended by Rozhishchers from Israel and abroad. Many came specially to Israel for this occasion which was the culmination of much enthusiastic effort on the part of Rozhishchers everywhere. Beth Rozhishch was consecrated to the memory of those who had perished in the Holocaust, as follows :

"May this House serve as a monument in the memory of the disaster to the nation, and may those coming to this House learn to remember what the Amalech of our generation has done to us, and may concern and thought be given in order that such a thing does not happen again.

I WILL NOT DIE — BUT I WILL LIVE — AM ISRAEL HAI!"

And the inaugural charter, dated March 11, 1961 reads: "We, the undersigned of the city of Rozhishch, Volhynia, living in Israel and the representatives of those living in Canada, the United States of



The late President of Israel, Zalman Shazar, at a reception at Beth Rozhishch. He is being greeted by our chairman, Avner Rachmieli. Standing (left) is Michael (Max) Pepper of Denver, Colorado.



The late David Ben Gurion talking with Yitzhak Rabin during a reception held in Beth Rozhishch in honour of Ambassador Asher Ben Nathan prior to the latter's departure for Germany as Israel's first Ambassador there.

America, Brazil, Argentina and in other countries, have gathered together this evening in order to inaugurate Beth Rozhishch.

"More than eighteen years have passed since eight thousand Jews of our city and its area were cruelly massacred by the Nazis and the Ukrainians, on Elul 10, 1942, and to this day there has been no mark made anywhere in this world of their sacred memory.

"This evening, March 11, 1961, in the Bar Mitzvah year of the state of Israel, we dedicate Beth Rozhishch and consecrate it to the memory of the Jewish community which perished together with the six million Jews of Europe.

"This house will be designated for those coming from our city, for social gatherings, for parties, receptions for guests from abroad, etc. Here the annual memorial services will be held each year, and a museum will be established for keeping of documents and other souvenirs of historic value of the annihilated community.

"In this House general cultural activities for adults and primarily for youth will take place in the form of lectures, exhibitions, conferences and the like. Here a library will be established with a special section which will contain the literature of the Holocaust.

"We, the representatives from abroad, will continue to assist you in equipping the House and operating it, and the Israeli committee will ensure that the House fulfills its role with distinction."

### **BETH ROZHISHCH ACTIVITIES**

Beth Rozhishch activities are many and varied. Its primary function is to unite Rozhishchers wherever they may be, and it is here that the many receptions are held for Rozhishchers who come to visit us from abroad.





Leah (Glazer) Gavish, a founding member and for many years chairman of the committee (centre), welcoming Mirel and Mendel Shames, from Canada, on the occasion of the dedication of the Beth Rozhishch Kitchen, July, 1965.

A reception held in Beth Rozhishch.

The annual memorial service is held here. Three memorial scrolls have been installed in the assembly hall where Rozhishchers from all over the world may have a tablet inscribed in the memory of their loved ones who perished in the Holocaust. Many Rozhishchers have come to Beth Rozhishch for this express purpose.

The society's general meetings are held here as well as the elections to the executive committee. Meetings of the executive committee, and the council and the provident fund committee also take place in Beth Rozhishch.

When the publication of this memorial book was decided on, it was at Beth Rozhishch that the editorial board met. It was there too that the many meetings with members, who gathered together to discuss, register, and tape record recollections for the book, and to collect and gather documents and other material were held.

A Scroll of Honour has been installed at Beth Rozhishch, where the names of particularly active members are inscribed.

#### PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

It is felt that the best memorial to the past lies in the future, and therefore we hope to be able to expand and develop our activities in order to build a bridge between the past and the young generation. Our plans include setting up a library in the clubroom of Beth Rozhishch; founding a scholarship fund for deserving pupils; enlarging our hall by closing in the patio.

It is our hope that these improvements will encourage the younger generation to identify with us, to come to Beth Rozhishch, to use it for cultural activities, to hold their celebrations — bar mitzvas, brith millas and even weddings at Beth Rozhishch where there are fine facilities for such celebrations, and also to become acquainted with friends from abroad there.





## The Rozhishch Society in the United States of America

The organization in the United States is called "The Society of Rozhishch Survivors". Bob (Berl) Gellerstein was its founder and first chairman. He is now the honorary president. He takes part in all the activities of the organization and maintains close contact with the Israeli society, and before Pesach each year, it is his custom to send us "ma'ot chitin" (to give assistance to the needy for Passover). He visits Israel often, and here, too, he is an active partner in all our activities.

Baruch Rozen, of blessed memory, was the chairman of the United States organization until the time of his death in November, 1975. He will be sorely missed by all of us, and we regret that he has not lived to see the publication of this book in which he took so active and enthusiastic an interest.

Bella Tepper is the secretary, Zusia Kromirs the treasurer, and among the active members are Paul Perlmutter, Ted Royffé, Phylis and Shike Widra.

Each year this organization holds a memorial service. It has purchased its own cemetery in New York, and has sent money to



Entrance to the Rozhishcher's cemetery in New York.



The late Baruch Rozen (who died in November, 1975) at the wedding of his daughter in New York.

Booklet published by the First  
Rozhishcher Benev. Ass'n. in New  
York in 1917.



the organization in Israel for the purchase of Beth Rozhishch and maintains active and close contact with us. Many of its members have visited Israel and Beth Rozhishch.

The Steinway grand piano for the Beth Rozhishch clubroom was donated by the Committee in the memory of the late Max Garbuz. The chairs for the auditorium were donated by Abe Perlmutter, Denver Colorado. There are many other members of the United States committee who are active and their names are inscribed on our Honour Roll.

## THE FIRST ROZHISHCHER BENEVOLENT ASSOCIATION

The society bearing the above name was composed of Rozhishchers who had immigrated to the United States at the beginning of the century. It was founded on May 31, 1913 and comprised many tens and perhaps even many hundreds of members. Its objective was mutual benefit and assistance.

Mr. Sam Shatz, when he visited Israel brought us the brochure of regulations of the society as well as the booklets which they had issued on the occasions of their 13th and 18th anniversaries.

During the Second World War, they maintained some contact with the Israel committee, headed by Leah Gavish. However, after those Rozhishchers who had arrived in the States just before and after World War Two organized themselves into another organization, these two groups apparently could not find a common language, and they did not unite nor did they maintain contact with each other. For some reason, this organization has not maintained contact with the Israel society either, and we regret that this important group of Rozhishchers was not a partner in the purchase of Beth Rozhishch and in the publication of this memorial book, although we did contact Mr. Zager in New York.



The 18th anniversary of the First  
Rozhishcher Benev. Ass'n. in New  
York, December 15, 1929.

## The Rozhishch Society in Canada

Only a few Rozhishchers live in Canada, however, their active committee has managed to bring together a considerable number of members, many from other Polish towns. The Canadian organization is named after the late Harry Odwak, of blessed memory, who was one of the first to found the committee.

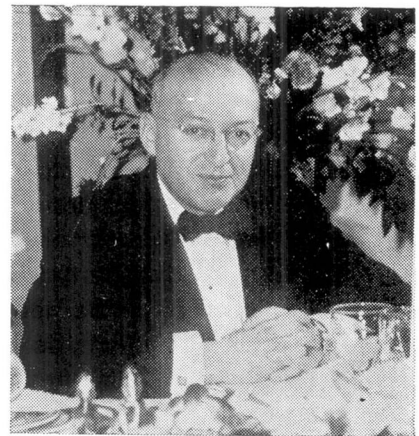
Every year this committee organizes a memorial service for their dear ones, and they regularly send us sums of money and maintain close contact with us, being active partners in the implementation of all our programs.

Sol Miller is the chairman of the committee. He and his wife, Ilana visit us in Israel every year and remain with us for a few months. Sol is a member of the editorial board for this book and participates in all our activities.

Mire'le and Mendel Shames devote all their strength and energy to the organization in Canada and to the excellent ties with the Israel organization. We will have more to say about them later.

Sonia and Louis Berger, of Sarnia, Ontario, were among the first to enthusiastically support the idea of the purchase of Beth Rozhishch. They headed the Building Committee, and when their son Leonard (Lozer) reached Bar Mitzva age, they contributed all the gift money he received for the occasion to the building fund.

This was the largest single contribution we received. They also influenced other Rozhishchers to contribute to this cause. Beth Rozhishch remembers them with appreciation for this great deed and has inscribed them on the Honour Roll.



Dr. David Monson



Reb Mayer Matel's and his children.  
Of the entire family, only Sol and Ben  
Miller of Canada survived.

Seymour Zuckerman is one of the active members of the Canadian committee, and it was at his home that the committee was first organized.

The Canadian committee has attracted a most interesting personality to its activities in the person of Rabbi Dr. David Monson. Dr. Monson is known in the United States and Canada as an enthusiastic Zionist and a warm-hearted Jew. He is involved in Hebrew education, is active in working for the Keren Kayemeth, the Histadruth and for Aliya to Israel. He also participates in inter-faith activities. Our friends in the Canadian committee appreciate him as a great personality and are proud of his interest in their small organization and grateful for the help which he extends to them. He attends every memorial service and has even visited Beth Rozhishch. We, in Israel, also regard him highly.

#### MIREL

Mire'le Shames is the living spirit of the Canadian organization. Her energy, devotion and love for humanity in general, and of Rozhishchers in particular, all of whom she regards as her family, have inspired members in the United States, in Brazil and in Israel to activity and achievements well worthy of note.

The first contact we in Israel had with Mire'le and Mendel was when the president of our organization met them in the winter of 1956 in Salt Lake City. At that time they were still not on their feet economically, but they really wanted to "do something" great



Sol Miller, Mirel and Mendel Shames  
— at a memorial service for Rozhishch  
victims, in Canada



A group of Rozhishchers in Canada  
in 1960.



and distinguished for the sake of the living and in memory of the loved ones who had perished in the Holocaust. Our president, Avner Rachmieli, was infected with their enthusiasm.

When they told him that this "something" should be done and that they would give the Israeli organization as much as they required, he knew that here were people who could be relied on. And indeed, this was exactly what he told a group of friends, including Baruch Rosen, Shike Widra and Ziske Kromirs at Bob Gellerstein's home in New York. It was there that it was suggested that the "something" be Beth Rozhishch. They promised help for the purchase of the house, for the provident society and for the publication of this memorial book.

Later, when our chairman visited Brazil, a group of Rozhishchers met at the home of Motel Weisberg, and there a committee was formed, which also promised to support the program.

On his return to Israel, he submitted the program to the committee of that time, headed by our dear friend, Leah Gavish. The idea was enthusiastically received, and it was decided to start working towards its realization. The plan was also made known in Argentina, where Haim Feffer worked towards its realization.

Each year the Canadian committee, regularly, sends us the sum of money promised. In recent years, they have even taken to holding the memorial service in Mire'le and Mendel's home in order to save expenses. This committee has contributed the kitchen equipment for Beth Rozhishch, in memory of Sonia Miller, of blessed memory.

When Mire'le first visited Israel, she found the kitchen empty of all dishes, glasses, cutlery and the like. One day she arrived at Beth Rozhishch, tired but satisfied. She had spent the day running around the shops, and had brought all this equipment to Beth Rozhishch.

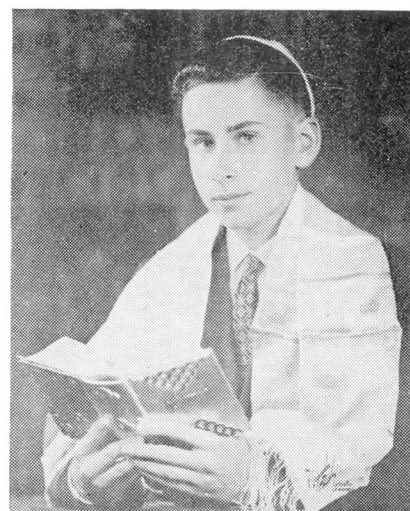
She and Mendel initiated the laying of the memorial tablet at Har Zion. They also arranged the special bus trip there for its dedication. This was an experience in itself.

Both she and Mendel have taken an interest in this book and have taken part, as members of the editorial committee, in the determining of its principles, as well as having written interesting and important articles for it. Their share in all our achievements is really significant. It would be difficult to imagine our organization without Mire'le.

Mendel, her husband, is at her side in all her activities, and the two of them do everything together. Mendel loves every Rozhishcher, wherever he may be. He remembers every detail of the town. Mire'le and Mendel were enthusiastically received on both their visits to Israel, as everybody loves them. A visit from Mire'le and Mendel Shames is a real treat for the hundreds of our members.



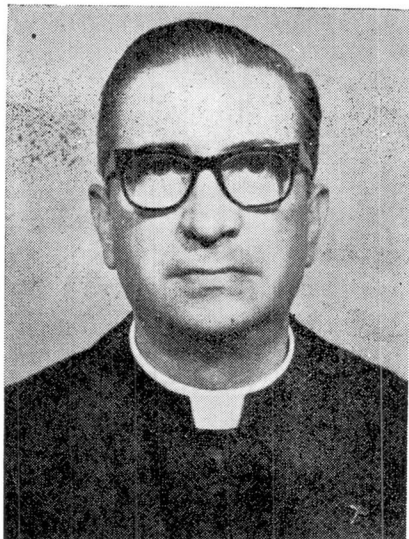
Sonia (Grabarski) Berger.



Leonard Berger, son of Louis and Sonia Berger, Sarnia, Ontario, who donated all his Bar Mitzvah gifts to the purchase of Beth Rozhishch.



## Rozhishch Society in Brazil



Bispó D'Oliveira.

When our chairman visited his brothers in Rio de Janeiro in 1957, he also visited Sao Paulo to meet with most of the Rozhishchers living there and in the adjoining city of Santo André.

The Brazilian committee was organized at the home of our dear friend, Motel Weisberg. It was headed by Golda Shevtz (Wollek), Motel Weisberg and Mendel Wollek. This committee has sent us sums of money to aid in our activities and in the acquisition of Beth Rozhishch. They often visit Israel. Golda has written an article for this book and has sent us some important photographs.

The Rozhishchers in Santo André have their own synagogue. They have become friendly with the local bishop, Dom Jorge Marcos de Oliveira, who is an interesting personality. It is his custom to come to the Synagogue on Yom Kippur and on Independence Day and to shake hands with everyone. His good friend, Idel Weisberg, brought him with him on a visit to Israel, and we held a reception in his honour at Beth Rozhishch.

The Bishop expressed his wonder at what he had seen in the country, and his deep love for the Bible and the Jewish people. He was very impressed with the Beth Rozhishch facilities, and noted the energy and devotion of a small group of people originating in small town who had set up a proud institution in the centre of Tel Aviv, of which even a much larger and more influential group could be proud.

## Rozhishch Society in Argentina



There are only a few Rozhishchers in Argentina. Haim Feffer maintains contact with us. A few years ago he sent us financial assistance (in the name of the Lutzk and Environs committee in Argentina) and we have received pictures and articles from him for this book. He and his wife have visited Israel twice and on each occasion they met with us for consultations in connection with our activities.