



שם טוב SHEM TOV

JEWISH GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY OF CANADA (TORONTO)

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THE SEARCH FOR ISAAC GROSS

By Lindy Goodman

Shortened version of presentation given at the June, 2008 meeting of JSG (Toronto)

It may seem odd but my father never met nor had any contact whatsoever with his paternal grandfather, Isaac Gross. You might say that really isn't so odd since my father lived in Toronto and his grandfather lived somewhere in Poland. In a sense, you might be correct but then again, he had a very close relationship with his paternal grandmother, Fanny, and with his paternal great grandparents, Nechemia and Gittel Gross, notwithstanding that they lived in Antwerp and he in Toronto. He also had a close relationship with his maternal grandparents, Rabbi Joseph and Rosa Freudmann, who lived in Antwerp. When my father was a young child, he was fortunate enough to go to Belgium quite a number of times and was able to meet them all and spend summers with them. Contact with his paternal grandfather, however, was non-existent. All my father knew was his grandfather's name, Isaac, and that he lived in a nameless town that his father, Selig, would only describe as being "within telephone distance of Vienna". I suppose that every family has "skeletons in their closet". Our family's "skeleton" was Isaac Gross.

I began my search for Isaac Gross around October 2006. I don't remember the exact date nor what possessed me to do so but one night, I googled his name and received a number of hits – one of which was the listing of the Jewish cemetery in a town called Chrzanow, Poland. At that point in time, I did not know which hit would be the right one. The name is quite common and his town was not known to me. I knew it was in Galicia and that it likely had some connection to Vienna, Austria. The only thing that twiggged my interest with this particular hit was that this particular Isaac Gross was the son of Yehoshua Selig Gross. My grandfather was Yehoshua Selig Gross, the son of Isaac. Could it be that my grandfather was named for his grandfather?

The exact steps of my search have become somewhat blurred in my memory but since my initial Google hit in October 2006, I have managed not only to find out information about my great grandfather but this past summer, I travelled to Poland in order to meet someone who, as a little boy, knew him intimately. I have also connected with distant cousins in Jerusalem, who were related to my great grandmother, Bonmama Fanny, and knew her well.

Some of the information that I have managed to gather is documented through primary sources; other pieces are based on

secondary sources and their validity can be questioned. Thus, the story that is being recorded here is subject to interpretation and could easily be modified in the future when more information becomes available. This seems to happen when you least expect it.

Isaac Gross was born in Chrzanow, Poland anywhere between 1872 and 1874. There are no official records of his birth and all information in this regard was obtained from data provided by his wife, Fanny, to the Belgian authorities under the Alien Register. What has been determined through official Polish documents is that he was born to Chaya Rauchwerger and Selig Gross. It is also unclear how many siblings he had, though I was told that he had a sister, Gittle Leizer. At this point, I have been unable to find any trace of his sister, any record of her existence or of the existence of other siblings, with one exception. I recently saw a Krakow marriage bann for Marcus Wolf Gross, Isaac's brother. Marcus was reported to be 10 years

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older than Isaac.

Isaac's mother, Chaya Rauchwerger, was the granddaughter of Rabbi Shlomo Bochner, the first Rabbi in Chrzanow. Rabbi Bochner was the son of Rabbi Moszes Charif, one of the last members of the Council of the Four Lands, which was the central body of Rabbinic Jewish authority in Poland from 1580 – 1764. Rabbi Bochner was known to be a modest and humble man. Although he was known to have a brilliant rabbinic mind, he believed that Torah should not be exploited for material gain – one should study Torah for its own sake but also have other means of earning a livelihood. He was held in very high regard even generations later as can be seen by the beautiful *ohel* that was recently restored in the Chrzanow cemetery.

In 1893, Isaac Gross married his cousin Fanny Gross in a religious ceremony. There are no official records of this union. It is also believed that they were not married civilly. Many Jews in Poland did not do so because it was very costly. The couple had two children – Selig, who was born on February 2, 1894, and Chaya (Hania), who was born on January 10, 1897.

Little is known of the early years of the couple's married life, but early in 1907, likely just after Selig's Bar Mitzvah, Fanny together with the two children left Chrzanow and moved to Antwerp, Belgium to join her parents. She may have obtained a *get* (a Jewish divorce) from Isaac, but that is also not documented. As well, in the last submission to the Alien Register in Antwerp for Fanny Gross after her death in 1964, it was

noted that she was the wife of Isaac Gross. Fanny never remarried and, as far as is known, neither Selig nor Hania ever went back to Chrzanow to visit their father.

Sometime after Fanny left Isaac, it seems that Isaac moved into the home of his cousin, Jacob Mandelbaum. According to Jacob Mandelbaum's grandson, Roman, Isaac lived in two small rooms within the Mandelbaum apartment at 12 Henryka Street in Chrzanow. Isaac did not work but learned Torah daily. He may also have been the *gabbai* of his shul. Roman remembers that Isaac had trouble getting around, possibly because of a club foot. Every day, Roman would bring a hot lunch from Gittle's house to Isaac and the two would sit and eat and learn together. Roman remembers Isaac Gross as a very gentle man, one who could never hurt a soul.

It was always thought that contact between Isaac and his children stopped completely when they moved to Belgium in 1907. However, Roman remembers that Isaac used to receive money from his son, Selig, who by 1920 lived in Toronto. The wires were sent through Western Union. Isaac would take whatever he needed for his own use, but he used to distribute the rest to the poor.

Isaac died on Erev Pesach, the 14th of Nissan 5699, April 3, 1939. The Mandelbaums arranged for a beautiful gravestone which is still in pristine condition as of today.

I was most fortunate to be able to meet Roman Mandelbaum and his brother, Sammy Mandelbaum, on August 7th, 2007 in Krakow. They had just helped to complete the restoration of the Chrzanow cemetery and had organized a rededication. Over

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The Jewish Genealogical Society of Canada (Toronto) was founded in 1986 and currently has about 200 members. Membership is \$40 per calendar year, \$18 for students. Meetings are held September to June, usually on the last Wednesday of each month at 8:00 p.m. (doors open at 7:30) at Shaarei Shomayim Synagogue, 470 Glencairn Avenue, Toronto (unless announced otherwise). Guests are always welcome. Details are usually printed in the *Canadian Jewish News* and on our website at: www.jgstoronto.ca.

The goal of the Society is to provide a forum for the exchange of knowledge and information through meetings, outings, workshops and guest lecturers, and thereby to promote an awareness of genealogy within the Jewish community of Canada. The Society is affiliated with the Jewish Federation of Greater Toronto and is registered as a non-profit charitable organization.

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200 ex-Chrzanower's came from Israel, Britain, Europe, Canada and the US to see the work that had been done to restore the tombstones, refurbish the two *ohalim* for Rabbi Shlomo Bochner and Rabbi David Halberstam and rebuild the wall surrounding the cemetery.

Prior to WWII, there were actually 2 Jewish cemeteries in Chrzanow. The smaller cemetery, located just down the road from this larger one, was destroyed by the Nazis and is now a gas station. The larger one had fallen into terrible disrepair but thanks mainly to the efforts of Sammy and the Halberstam family, it has been cleaned up. As well, many of the tombstones have been documented and can be viewed online at www.Gidonim.com.

There have been many times during my on-again and off-again search for information about Isaac Gross that I have felt that I have reached a dead-end. – the so-called brick wall. But I have learnt never to give up. Many times you may just have a small hint or clue but it is amazing what can transpire.

How did I come to meet Roman Mandelbaum? It is a valid question and one that emerged from a story my father told me a long time ago. My father retired from his business 21 years ago and passed away 7 years later. As part of his business, he used to travel to Israel 2 or 3 times a year. He always stayed at the Tel Aviv Hilton and would daven there on Shabbat. On one of his last trips, he went into shul on Friday night and said hello to the Shamas, who he knew quite well. Mr. Mandelbaum overheard the conversation and when he found out that my father was from Toronto, he asked him if he knew Selig Gross. My father practically fell off his chair. Mr. Mandelbaum also wanted to know if my father knew Isaac Gross. My father indicated that Selig was his father and Isaac was his grandfather, though he had never met him. They spoke for a bit. Mr. Mandelbaum explained his connection to Isaac Gross and his memories of him. My father came home and told me the story about meeting a gentleman from Zurich, Switzerland who knew my ggfather. He also relayed the story of the hot lunches and that Selig had sent money to Isaac every so often. I could not remember the name of this individual but some of the details of the story remained with me. When I was doing my research for Isaac Gross, I posted the information that I recalled of this story on-line in the hopes that it would ring a bell for someone. Luckily, it did. I received some information from Simon Szrebny, a distant relative and also a descendant of Rabbi Shlomo Bochner. Simon has done a tremendous amount of work on Chrzanow Jewry and he posed a guess that the gentleman that I was looking for was Roman Mandelbaum. He forwarded Mr. Mandelbaum's phone number and address to me, as well as that of his sister and brother-in-law in Queen's, NY. I called the brother-in-law, who is the head of the Chrzanower society in NY and he was able to confirm the story. He also sent me a picture of my ggfather's tombstone. Once I had the confirmation, I called Roman Mandelbaum and began a series of conversations with him.

On the basis of our new friendship, Roman thought to invite me to the rededication of the cemetery. He called just before Pesach, 2007 and asked if I could come. It took some arm twisting to get my husband, Sheldon, on side – he has little interest

in genealogy – but he soon agreed. We spent 4 days in Poland, met Roman and his brother, Sammy, and even took a guide to see Tarnow, the town where Sheldon's mother was born.

Another element of surprise - my uncle passed away a few years ago and I was given a suitcase that was found in his house. The suitcase was filled with hundreds of pictures and documents that my grandmother had saved over the years. There were numerous old photos; some that were not easily identified. There in the midst of it all is a picture of Isaac Gross with my grandfather, Selig, and his sister, Hania. The long-lost relative actually had a face and even though, my grandmother would never talk about him – she actually had his picture. How very strange!!! I confirmed that the picture was of Isaac, when I compared it to a picture given to me by Roman Mandelbaum. Through all the horrors of the war, his family had saved a picture of my ggfather. Very unusual – it was a very special relationship. In fact, even Sammy confirmed this to me. He remembers attending my ggfather's funeral – it was the first funeral he was permitted to attend but Isaac was considered family and so he was allowed to go.

I also have no idea about my ggfather's siblings. Just a few weeks ago, a distant relative notified me that he had found the name of a brother of my ggfather's. Whenever these tidbits of information come around, I get a renewed urge to move on with my search. I can go for months doing nothing and then, I start anew. The story will keep on growing and likely will never end. There will always be unanswered issues but the picture is much clearer in my mind. I have begun to document everything for my family so that they will have a clear picture of their heritage. Genealogy is fascinating.

ADVERTISING RATES

SHEM TOV is now accepting display advertising for publication. Advertisers are requested to supply camera-ready art and payment by February 2009 for the Spring issue. Please indicate how many insertions you would like. As the chart indicates our basic rate is discounted for advertisements placed in four consecutive issues (one year) instead of a single issue only. By placing an ad in SHEM TOV, you are reaching a growing number of readers in Toronto, across Canada and internationally, and helping to support a unique and vital journal.

	One Issue	Four Issues (one year)
Full Page	\$60	\$200
Half Page	\$30	\$100
Quarter Page	\$18	\$ 60
Eighth Page	\$10	\$ 32

Search ads are also available. Rates are \$5 for the first 25 words and 25¢ per word thereafter, your name and address are free. Please write advertisement clearly with family surnames you are researching in UPPER CASE letters. Make your cheque payable to Jewish Genealogical Society of Canada (Toronto) and mail to: JGS of Canada (Toronto), P.O. Box 91006, 2901 Bayview Ave., Toronto, Ontario M2K 1H0.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Programs organized by the Jewish Genealogical Society of Canada (Toronto)

Unless otherwise noted, programs take place at the Shaarei Shomayim Synagogue - 470 Glencairn Ave.

Doors open at 7:30, program begins at 8 p.m.

Non-member fee: \$5.00 per meeting

(exception: spouses accompanying members)

Wednesday, December 17, 2008

1. Annual General Meeting & Elections

2. Usual Resources for Genealogical Research for Western Galicia, Poland

Speaker: **Peter Jassem**, member of the Board of Directors, JRI-Poland Project and the Polish-Jewish Foundation of Canada
This slide show covers the access and use of Galician government records, court proceedings, interwar identification papers, and educational records as well as property and business documents.

Wednesday, January 28, 2009

The History of Ukraine 1740-1940, the Changing Borders and the Jewish Communities of Ukraine during this Time Period

Speaker: Professor Paul Magocsi, University of Toronto
Co-sponsored with The Canadiana Department of the Toronto Public Library

Wednesday, February 25, 2009

TBA

Wednesday, March 25, 2009

Evolving Genealogy Internet Research and the Risk and Rewards of Placing Data on Social Interaction Networks and Genealogy related Databases

Speaker: **Henry Blumberg**

Power Point presentation providing a review of the emerging trends in genealogy websites and examines search engines, directories, hosted or archival solutions such as JewishGen, custom Personal Data Bases, family websites created by individuals as well as *shtetl* sites. It will also examine the new frontier of proliferating social interaction networks such as Facebook, MySpace, Geni etc. and the benefits and risks of the enhanced exchange of information, including loss of privacy and giving up rights to data and images.

Mr. Blumberg was born in South Africa and immigrated with his family to Canada in 1980. He is the Managing Partner of his Toronto law firm. He is the President of Latvia SIG for the third term and has been particularly interested in the evolving nature of web-related internet research. He has also presented papers on a number of genealogy-related subjects and has been involved in supporting the erection of memorials in Latvia to Jews murdered during the Holocaust. He has visited Lithuania and Latvia a number of times and was a speaker at the launch of the Names and Fates Project in Riga in June 2008.

Wednesday, April 29, 2009

Who Owns the Information in Your Family Tree?

Speaker: *Margaret Ann Wilkinson, Professor, University of Western Ontario*

Wednesday, May 27, 2009

Tour – Details TBA

Wednesday, June 24, 2009

Breakthroughs and Year-End Meeting: Member presentations (Great Foundations and Brick Walls)

For updated details on all programmes, visit our website:
www.jgstoronto.ca

Volunteers Needed, and More!

JGS Toronto is a community of like-minded individuals who have come together to collaborate and hopefully share their insights and expertise. There is a lot that is happening in your Society that is intended to give you, the members, improved skills and knowledge to assist you in your family research. Therefore, our success depends on you!

We need a photographer (with a digital camera!) to attend our monthly meetings to **photograph speakers and guests**. The photographer can also be of assistance in helping us accumulate, categorize and archive historical photos of interest for inclusion on our new website as well as in *Shem Tov*. If you are interested please email Harvey Glasner at shemtov@jgstoronto.ca.

Elaine Slavens is still looking for volunteers to help out on the **Toronto Digital Photography Project** of the **Cemetery Committee**. Please email cemetery@jgs.ca if you can photograph headstones and/or transcribe data to Excel.

We are seeking someone to be responsible for our **membership database**, specifically to maintain our membership records and send out email messages to members. We also require someone to handle **membership recruitment and retention**. This person would work with the Executive to find ways to attract new members and to respond to members' needs. To volunteer for either of these positions, please contact Shelley Stillman: president@jgstoronto.ca.

Perhaps you have a **great idea for a topic or speaker** for our monthly meetings. Please send your suggestions to Les Kelman: program@jgstoronto.ca.

Do you have a wonderful old photo that you think should appear in *Shem Tov*? Please email a digital copy, along with a brief description, to shemtov@jgstoronto.ca, or send forth a message to ask about having it scanned.

Marking Toronto Jewish History

by Judy Kasman

The events below, while not strictly genealogical, are relevant to researchers whose roots are intertwined with the history of Jewish Toronto over the past century. It is fitting also in the context of the recent passing of Dr. Stephen Speisman ז"ל whose efforts were so significant in keeping Toronto Jewish history alive.

On May 25, 2008, a plaque was unveiled in Bellevue Square in downtown Toronto's Kensington Market, designating the area as a national historic site. This commemoration was sponsored by Parks Canada and was attended by Mayor David Miller, David Koschitzky, Chair of UJA Federation of Greater Toronto and by Ellen Scheinberg, Director of the Ontario Jewish Archives. Jewish immigrants lived and established their shops in Kensington Market primarily between 1905 and 1930 and continued to inhabit the area in sizeable numbers into the 1950s. Although other waves of immigration followed, a number of Jewish businesses still exist there today. In addition, the area boasts the Kiever Shul, built in 1927, and the Minsker Shul, built in 1930, both of which are still in operation today as orthodox synagogues.

On August 17, 2008, Heritage Toronto unveiled a plaque to commemorate the Christie Pits riot which had taken place on August 16, 1933. This incident, which arose when, at the end of a softball game between the St. Peter's and the Jewish Harbord Playground team, the Anglo-Canadian Pit Gang raised a flag bearing a large black swastika. A six-hour melee ensued, the combatants armed with bats, bottles, etc., with both sides bringing reinforcements from their respective neighbourhoods. The battle represented the anti-Semitic sentiment that was rampant in Toronto at the time. Judy Stoffman, Chair of the Christie Pits plaque committee, felt that the plaque was needed to serve as a reminder of this dark time in the history of Toronto, while people who remembered the event were still living.

On September 8, 2008 at the Miles Nadal JCC, Heritage Toronto presented a plaque to UJA Federation of Greater Toronto to commemorate its 91-year history of being a major cultural and philanthropic institution for the Toronto Jewish community; Federation's work in support of Jews has made a most positive impact on the city at large. The plaque is to be installed in front of 220 Simcoe Street, Federation's first building.

A plaque was dedicated by Heritage Toronto in October to the Kiever Synagogue (mentioned above), formally known as the First Russian Congregation of Rodfei Sholem Anshei Kiev, incorporated in 1914 and at its present location in Kensington Market since 1917. The plaque was presented to mark both the history and design of the building, which was designed by architect Benjamin Swartz.

October 29, 2008 marked Toronto's final Hadassah-WIZO (CHW) Bazaar, one of the world's largest annual bazaars, after 84 years. This event was a Toronto institution, anxiously anticipated by many attendees; the Bazaar over the years raised very substantial funds to support health, social welfare and educational programs in Israel & Canada, especially those for women and children.

Dr. Stephen Speisman ז"ל: An Appreciation

by Dr. Ellen Scheinberg, Director, Ontario Jewish Archives

Stephen Speisman passed away on October 22nd, 2008. He was born in Toronto in 1943, the son of Tommy and Rose Speisman. His family came from Ostrowiec, Poland. The original name was Szpijzmacher, but the family changed it to Speisman during the 1920s or 30s.

Stephen grew up in a religious home. He davened with his father at Bais Yehuda Synagogue where his grandfather was the Shammash. After his family moved north, they joined Adath Israel Congregation. He later became a member of the BAYT. He was always very involved with the community, participating in Jewish boy scouts during his youth and later teaching Sunday school at Adath Israel as a teen. At that time, he also developed an interest in the history of Jewish Toronto, through a project that he pursued taking photographs of many of the old synagogues in town.

He studied history and completed his Ph.D. at the University of Toronto. His dissertation was later published as a book in 1979 and entitled *The Jews of Toronto: A History to 1937*. This work examines the history of Jewish Toronto during its formative years and serves as the definitive work on that subject. In 1980, the City of Toronto recognized the importance of this work, honouring Stephen with their annual Book Award.

Stephen founded the Ontario Jewish Archives in 1973, which is now part of UJA Federation of Greater Toronto, but earlier reported to the Canadian Jewish Congress' Central Region Office. They started off on Beverley Street where the archives were located next to the furnace. It wasn't bright, spacious or clean, but he made the best of it and acquired many important collections during that time. He also attracted many devoted volunteers, some of whom have been associated with the OJA for more than twenty-five years. The archives eventually moved to the Lipa Green building in 1983, where he was provided with a state-of-the-art storage vault and generous office and processing space.

During his tenure as Director of the OJA, Stephen took great pleasure serving as a guide for the Sense of Spadina Tour, which has been operating for over thirty years. He would regale the participants with stories about old Jewish Toronto, bringing the sights and sounds of that era to life.

In 1999, he accepted the position of Executive Director of Pardes Shalom Cemetery. He participated in the expansion of the cemetery and made his mark on that important institution while he was there.

Stephen will be remembered for his commitment to Jewish history, heritage and the community. He was truly a pioneer in the establishment of one of the first ethnic/religious archives in Ontario as well as in regards to his scholarship on Jewish life in Toronto. Stephen was a soft-spoken person who was extremely knowledgeable and well versed in a variety of areas. He was truly a gentleman and a *mensch*. He will be greatly missed by his UJA Federation colleagues and the OJA Board, staff and volunteers.

It Happened Long Ago...Sharing Your Family Story

By Myrna Levy

"Bubie, when you were a little girl, what was your favorite food?"

"Borscht."

"What's borscht, Bubie?"

That was one of the exchanges heard on a Sunday afternoon in early November between a grandmother and her granddaughter. They were participating in the first intergenerational program that was jointly sponsored by JGS (Toronto) and the Canadian Friends of Hebrew University (CFHU).

The idea originated with Elana Segal of CFHU. Shelley Stillman, JGS (Toronto) President, eagerly accepted her invitation to join in designing a workshop that would have the young participants learn how to begin a Family Tree and interview a member of the family.

The actual workshop was designed by two JGS (Toronto) members, Betty Sherwood and me. As former teachers, we understood the challenge of using activities simple enough for the younger generation to do, while at the same time adhering to sound genealogical practice.

Approximately one dozen pairs of grandparents and grandchildren responded to the invitation extended by CFHU, JGS (Toronto) and Darchei Noam Congregation, where the workshop was held. One intergenerational pair was a great-grandmother who came with her great-granddaughter. Another "grandmother" confided that she was actually adopted by the family of good friends.

The afternoon was divided into two parts. During the first half, Betty Sherwood explained the intricacies of filling in a family tree. Along the way such technical terms as generation, spouse, genes (not jeans) were described. Then everyone went to work, with the grandparents sometimes discovering that they didn't have all the information at their fingertips.

"I'll have to ask your great Uncle what his Hebrew name is," was one comment heard.

After a break, the groups moved on to learning how to conduct an interview. A six-page questionnaire guided the young people to find out and note what their grandparents did and how they lived when they were young.

Some of the grandparents brought in photographs to share with their grandchildren. They were reminded to make sure that

photographs are annotated with dates and names of the people pictured.

The two hours passed quickly and all agreed that while they accomplished a great deal, there was much more to do at home, with a whole other side of the family to learn about.

A copy of the booklet the participants received has been placed in our library collection.

Acknowledgements

As 2008 comes to a close, it is important to recognize the contributions of our members who have served on the JGS Toronto Executive and thank them for their efforts:

Shelley Stillman - President

Lucy Sadowski - Secretary

Steve Gora - Treasurer

Stephen Creed - Member-at-Large; Refreshments

Les Kelman - Member-at-Large; Programming

Neil Richler - Member-at-Large; Membership

David Trost - Member-at-Large; Cemetery Database; Website Update Project

We thank Past Presidents **Henry Wellisch**, **Gert Rogers** and (by email from Hong Kong) **Carolynne Veffler** for their continuing support and involvement.

We also wish to acknowledge the work of other members on behalf of our Society:

Elaine Cheskes - Librarian; **Sara Faerman** - Photographer;

Harvey Glasner & Judy Kasman - *Shem Tov* Co-Editors;

Kevin Hanit - Audio Visual Technician and Cemetery Database Manager; **Michael Keleman** - Greeter; **Ruth Chernia**

and all the contributors to *Shem Tov*; **Terri Rothman** - Past Webmaster; **Arthur Ryman** - New Website Administrator;

Stan Zeidenberg - Charitable Donations Coordinator (JewishGen & JRI-Poland)

In addition, thanks go to members of the following Committees:

Cemetery Photography Project

Elaine Slavens - Coordinator; Photographers: Society Members: Harvey Glasner, Beverley Lokash, Gordon Magrill, Syd Moscoe, David Trost

Members of the Community: Alex Edwards, Benjamin Glatt, Denise Hummel, Justin Hummel, Achim Krull, Myriam Levy, Robert Lubinski, Karen Perlmutter, Hazel Saint-Pierre, Elsa Skuy, K.S. Spencer, Sharon Vanderveen

Program Committee

Les Kelman - Chair; Linda Offman, Lucy Sadowski, Karen Sanders, Stan Zeidenberg

Telephone Squad - Nora Freund, Linda Offman



Myrna Levy (right) and workshop participants

I'm Jewish? Family Secret Hidden from Nazis

By Stuart Laidlaw, Faith and Ethics Reporter

The Toronto Star, November 6, 2008

Reprinted with permission - Torstar Syndication Services

Imagine this.

You've got a new job and the local paper is doing a story about you. When the reporter calls for the interview, he informs you that – despite being raised Catholic – you are, in fact, Jewish.

And your relatives died in the Holocaust.

That's what happened to Madeline Albright a decade ago shortly after she was named the first female secretary of state for the U.S. The revelation shook her to her core.

"Suddenly you are taking on thousands of years of history, thousands of years of painful history," says Barbara Kessel, author of *Suddenly Jewish: Jews Raised as Gentiles Discover Their Jewish Roots*, who is in Toronto this week for Holocaust Education Week.

In preparation for writing her book, *Suddenly Jewish*, Barbara Kessel took out a simple ad in *The New York Times Book Review* and on several websites. These are some of the responses she received:

"I was born in Poland, raised Catholic, immigrated to the U.S. in '59 at age 7, and learned at 22 (the night before my Roman Catholic wedding) that both my parents were Holocaust survivors and that all of our family is Jewish."

"When we found out my family was Jewish, my wife's reaction was, 'Boy, I'm glad you're not an anti-Semite.' My first reaction was, 'I'm glad you're not!'"

"I was glad to find out I'm Jewish. I got rid of Christmas, Heaven and Hell – all in the same day!"

"Well, the world caved in. How could I go on to be a priest if I wasn't even Catholic? I abandoned everything ... Today I am an observant Jew. If you ask me what I believe, that is a complicated question."

Albright's discovery led her, six months later, to the Old Jewish Cemetery of Prague and the Pinkas Synagogue, where the names of her paternal grandparents, Olga and Arnost Korbel, are listed among 77,000 Czech and Slovak victims of the Holocaust.

Like many Jews unaware of their history, Albright's had been lost in the escape from the Holocaust.

Parents hid children with non-Jewish families, and never returned to collect them after the war.

Others left Europe and denied their Jewish heritage as a way to escape anti-Semitism. Even in North America, where they were supposedly safe, their fear was so great that they could never admit to being Jewish.

That's journalist Kati Marton's story. While working on an article about the Holocaust, she interviewed an elderly couple who had survived Auschwitz – when suddenly they told her they had known Marton's maternal grandparents in the camp.

They didn't survive.

Marton, like many others, was at first angry that her parents had kept this from her. But she soon came to accept that for

many who had survived, it was impossible to shake the belief it could one day be dangerous again to be Jewish.

"My parents must have thought they were protecting us," Marton recalls in the book.

She had come to Albright's defence when her story was met with skepticism and indignation by people across the United States, many of whom doubted it was possible for someone to be so unaware of her own family history.

"How could she not know?" asks Kessel, summing up the reaction of many.

Perhaps more disturbingly, some people reacted by saying they "knew" Albright was Jewish, Kessel says.

Albright's story got Kessel wondering about others who discovered late in life they were Jewish. She took out a small notice in *The New York Times Book Review* asking for people in a similar situation.

She was flooded by responses, and eventually interviewed more than 160 people for the book, in which she reprints the interviews almost verbatim with the least amount of her own writing and interpretation she could get away with.

"I really wanted this to be in their voice," she says.

The result is a book that began with a simple oddity – people who didn't know they were Jewish suddenly finding they were – and ended as a look at identity and how we define ourselves.

Many of those interviewed abandoned whatever Christian faith they had been raised with to embrace Judaism, with some becoming leaders in the Jewish community – even rabbis.

Fourteen of those she met had converted to Judaism before they found out that, heretically, they already were Jewish. Like the others, these 14 said they always felt more like Jews than Christians, that something about their Christian lives was never a good fit.

Kessel admits that she wondered for a time if there was something mystical in such stories, or whether faith, traditions and belief systems eventually become part of our genetic codes.

More likely, she says now, the Jewish rites around diet or social outlook morphed over time into family traditions and mannerisms that echoed Judaism and made it seem a good fit once it was rediscovered.

"It awakened memories that were not even conscious," Kessel says.

While most of the people she spoke to were the children of Holocaust survivors, others were descendants of Jews who had escaped the pogroms of Eastern Europe in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Some even traced their Jewish heritage to the Spanish Inquisition more than 500 years ago, when Jews were forced to convert to Catholicism. Despite this, many to this day secretly maintain their Jewish heritage even though they remain Catholic to the outside world.

SITE-SEEING

A Compendium of Useful Websites for Genealogists

New at Library and Archives Canada

Library and Archives Canada (LAC) is pleased to announce the launch of *In Quarantine: Life and Death on Grosse Île, 1832-1937*, a project funded by the Department of Canadian Heritage through its Canadian Culture Online Program.

Featuring a variety of documents preserved and digitized by LAC, such as lists of births and deaths at sea, hospital registers, journals, letters, photographs and maps, this virtual exhibition tells the story not only of the quarantine station, but also of the individuals who experienced life on the island.

Immigrants at Grosse Île, a database containing thousands of digitized documents related to individuals who lived on Grosse Île, is now available through the website at:

www.collectionscanada.ca/grosse-ile

80 Years of Historical Canadian Directories Online – 5.2 Million Names

From Ancestry.ca:

Ancestry.ca launches pre-telephone Canadian City and Area Directories, 1819-1899

(Toronto, ON – October 28th, 2008) In a world-first, Ancestry.ca launched online the fully indexed Canada City and Area Directories, 1819-1899, which feature the names and addresses of more than 5.2 million people who lived in Canada during the greater part of the 19th Century.

In total, 19,764 pages of directory pages were scanned and are now available to search online. A precursor to phone books, these historic directories feature an alphabetical listing of the majority of heads of households in major cities across Canada along with their address and occupation. It also lists businesses, town officers, schools, societies, churches and other public institutions.

Aside from finding one's own ancestors within this collection, enthusiasts will be able to find records of Prime Ministers, politicians, celebrities and other prominent figures from the time, including Sir John A. MacDonald. There is a record of him in a Victoria directory from 1889 driving the last spike in the Canadian Pacific Railroad on Vancouver Island in 1886.

The collection, which until now was only partially available on microfiche, is now complete and fully indexed online for the first time, making searching simpler and faster.

The Canada City and Area Directories, 1819-1899 will be available to Canada and World Deluxe members and through a 14-day free trial with www.ancestry.ca.

Historical Records Of 600,000 Canadian WWI Heroes Now Online

From the Generations Network, the parent company of Ancestry.ca:

Soldiers of the first War - 600,000 records of our World War One heroes, including famous Canadians - John McCrae, Tommy Douglas and Frederick Banting

Between 1914-1918, more than 600,000 Canadian men, most untrained civilians, braved foreign soil to join the Allied Forces in an effort to restore peace and freedom to the world, with more than 60,000 making the ultimate sacrifice.

On November 5, 2008, Ancestry.ca announced access to *Soldiers of the First World War, 1914 - 1918*, which contains the original records, fully searchable, of more than 598,000 Attestation Papers, the first documents soldiers signed before entering the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF), of enlisted soldiers.

Ancestry.ca and Familysearch Announce Agreement To Digitize and Index Existing Canadian Censuses

From FamilySearch and by The Generations Network, parent company of Ancestry.ca:

Joint initiative provides online access to a comprehensive collection of Canadian censuses

On November 11, 2008 Ancestry.ca announced a joint initiative with FamilySearch International, a nonprofit organization that maintains one of the world's largest repositories of genealogical resources, to allow the organizations to improve online access to a comprehensive collection of Canadian censuses.

As part of the agreement, FamilySearch will digitize and index Canadian census records that Ancestry.ca has acquired. These digitized and indexed records will then be made available to Ancestry.ca members on the company's website, and in time, the indexes will also be available to the public at FamilySearch.org. The images will be free to qualified FamilySearch members and all FamilySearch family history centres.

FamilySearch will deliver images and indexes to Ancestry.ca for censuses from 1861, 1871, 1881 and 1916 Censuses to launch online in 2009. In return, Ancestry.ca will provide images and indexes to FamilySearch for the 1851, 1891, 1901 and 1906 Censuses.

Cont'd on Page 9

Site-Seeing - Cont'd from previous page

**From Nu? What's New? Volume 9, Number 25 /
November 9, 2008
Ancestry.com Webinar**

Recently, Gary Mokotoff & Mike Daniels of Ancestry.com led an online seminar about the new Jewish genealogy landing page: <http://www.ancestry.com/jewishfamilyhistory>.

The webinar is now in the Ancestry archives. You can view it by going to <http://learn.ancestry.com/LearnMore/Webinars.aspx> and clicking the appropriate topic. Upon reaching the site, first click on "Test Your System" to confirm you have the additional software that will allow you to view the webinar.

**Volume9, Number 24 / November 2, 2008
Back Issues of Canadian Jewish Review
Now Online**

Visit <http://multiculturalcanada.ca/mcc.cir> to see back issues of the *Canadian Jewish Review* from 1921 to 1966 (N.B. some years are missing)

*Send your suggestions of valuable genealogical websites
to shemtov@jgstoronto.ca*

***We Welcome These New Members
to Our Society***

Jacqueline Gruszecki Sharon Zane



On November 5, JGS (Toronto) co-sponsored a Holocaust Education Week programme with Beth Lida Congregation, where the event took place. Jerrold Landau, translator of Yizkor Books, spoke on the topic: Holocaust Testimonies and Eastern European History: What Can You Learn From Yizkor Books?

From left to right: Jerrold Landau, Linda Offman, Shelley Stillman, Les Kelman

Holocaust Education Week Programme

by Judy Kasman, with notes from Shelley Stillman

On November 5, JGS (Toronto) co-sponsored a Holocaust Education Week programme with Beth Lida Congregation, where the event took place. Jerrold Landau, translator of *Yizkor Books*, spoke on the topic: *Holocaust Testimonies and Eastern European History: What Can You Learn From Yizkor Books?*

Jerrold Landau of Toronto, by happenstance about ten years ago, began translating *Yizkor Books* from Yiddish and Hebrew into English, doing this painstaking, part-time work in addition to his regular employment at IBM and raising a family. He has translated about twelve books to date.

Yizkor Books were written by Holocaust survivors mostly in the late 1940s into the 1970s to remember with profound sadness their lost or destroyed towns and to memorialize *landsleit* (compatriots) who suffered horrible fates. There are about 1,200 books in existence, with over 900 available at The New York Public Library (www.nypl.org) in Manhattan; also in New York, over 750 *Yizkor Books* can also be found at YIVO, www.yivo.org. Many are also located in Toronto at the Robarts Library (University of Toronto);. Lists of *Yizkor Books* and many English translations can be found at www.jewishgen.org.

Although each *Yizkor Book* is unique, each invariably contain a history of the town – some organizers hired historians to research archives, such as Minsk which provides details from back to the 14th century; Holocaust history – about 25% of the content is testimony and recollection; and some post-Holocaust history – accounts from people who went back to their towns after the War. Most books also boast photographs, maps and names of those *landsleit* who perished, often commemorated by family-members who survived the Holocaust. Some books have poetry.

Yizkor Books have many personal stories, and usually each chapter of a book is written by a different individual. These can be first-person remembrances of what life was like pre-War, or first-hand testimonials of the experiences of surviving the torturous Holocaust years. Some chapters are a few pages in length, while others can be 30 – 40 pages with vivid details. Naturally, the stories are subjective, some in a better writing style than others.

Jerrold related some fascinating stories that he had translated to English, detailing harrowing experiences of Jews hidden in a pit for years by Poles, the actions of captors, the horrible living conditions, and much more. His talk was extremely fitting, both as a Holocaust Education Week programme and as a part of JGS (Toronto)'s mandate to educate Society members and the public about topics of interest for genealogists.

All in all, *Yizkor Books* are very significant in capturing in writing one of the darkest periods of Jewish history since they tell the stories of people who lived through it; they also keep alive the memories of those who could not. Jerrold Landau's translation work is vital in order to bring *Yizkor Books* to a wider (i.e. English-reading) audience.

A Genealogy Project Leads to Fascinating Find

Originally appeared in The Canada Jewish News on Thursday, 12 June 2008

Reprinted with permission of the author, who resides in Israel.

I've been interested in my roots since childhood, but I recently renewed my ongoing interest because my daughter, Naomi, has had a year-long Grade 7 project on the topic.

The journey has been enriching for both Naomi and for the whole family. We discovered much about our history and that of the assorted communities from which our ancestors came.

Naomi is the progeny of a rich blend of different cultures and traditions, from East and from West, with grandparents from Poland, India, England and Holland, each with a unique mélange of ancestries.

She spent hours interviewing older family members, gathering historical facts and fascinating anecdotes, some of which were not previously known. Relatives willingly provided stories and information about their branches of the family, eager to help and to be part of the project.

The Internet has been central. We found archives, articles, stories and other materials about the places our forefathers had come from. Through it, we also found lost relatives. It helped us to build a family tree of more than 500 people.

While reams could be written about each of Naomi's grandparents and their pasts, one discovery we made while investigating my father's family history was particularly moving.

The decimation of Holland's Jewry in the Holocaust was immense. Of the 140,000 people registered as Jews with the Germans, 107,000 were deported and only 5,500 returned.

While researching the topic, we compiled a Lootsteen family tree going back eight generations. The story it tells is chilling. The Germans and the Dutch were pedantic about details. Precise deportation records exist, including for dozens of Lootsteens. For instance, my great-grandmother, Mietje Lootsteen, was deported to Auschwitz and murdered there on Sept. 21, 1942. Her son, Mozes (my grandfather's brother) met a similar fate on Jan. 31, 1943, as did his wife, Margareet, and their 14-year-old daughter, Mary, on Oct. 12, 1942.

Miraculously, my father's nuclear family survived, in no small measure because of my grandmother's bravery and her connections with the underground, and because my grandfather boldly removed the infamous yellow Star of David from his clothing.

At war's end, my grandparents knew of only five living Lootsteens – the four in their immediate family and one cousin. I grew up knowing there were no other Lootsteens in the world.

But researching the family tree, we discovered that one branch had apparently not been completely severed. While there were death dates for nearly all the Lootsteens, there wasn't one for a woman named Carla. If alive, she'd be my father's second cousin. I scoured the Internet for any possible sign of her, eventually coming up with what appeared to be a phone number in Holland.

I phoned with Naomi at my side. After all, it was her project that had produced these results. We dialed the number and, lo and behold, a man answered. I explained who I was and why

we were calling. He listened, and after asking me a couple of questions, he passed me on to his wife, Carla.

We spoke for half an hour or so. At first, she was astonished, but she soon began to tell me her life story. She'd been hidden with good people after both her parents were taken away, and she came out of the war thinking that she was the only Lootsteen on earth.

I got back to my father with the amazing news. Ever since, he and Carla have been in touch several times a week, by phone or via the Internet – just getting to know each other. Carla, who knew of no living relatives, enjoyed learning of her "new" extended family, and we were curious about hers.

All of this culminated, at the beginning of May, with a trip to Holland by my father, sister and me to meet Carla and her family. It was wonderful, emotional and natural. We hit it off famously. The experience left us feeling that it was the beginning of a great relationship.

None of this would have happened if it weren't for Naomi's school project. But it also required courage on the part of my father and Carla, and their willingness to take the emotional plunge into the past and open old wounds. Not everyone could travel that road. They consented, and we have all been enriched and rewarded.

Time is short. Those who remember will disappear. If you can, go down the road. Help them take the plunge before it's too late. The rewards will be gratifying.

New Membership Rate for 2009

In an effort to meet with rising costs,
our annual dues increase to \$40.00
effective January 1, 2009.

Student rates remain at \$18.00 per year.

We thank you for your anticipated cooperation.

Support Your Society

JGS (Toronto) will gladly accept your
financial Contributions so that it can
maintain high-calibre programming.

Please consider sponsoring an event when honouring
or memorializing a loved-one.

Tax-receipts are issued for all donations.

Please contact treasurer@jgstoronto.ca.

Branching Out

By Elaine Cheskes

New Acquisitions to the JGS of Canada (Toronto) Collection at the North York Central Library (Gladys Allison, Canadiana Room, 6th floor)

Hatcher, Patricia Law. *Producing a Quality Family History*. Salt Lake City, Ut.: Ancestry, 1996.

Sack, Sallyann Amdur, and Gary Mokotoff, eds. *Avotaynu Guide to Jewish Genealogy*. Bergenfield, N.J.: Avotaynu, 2004.

Please see the review of these books below:

Avotaynu Guide to Jewish Genealogy

Have you reached rock bottom? Sack and Mokotoff, the gurus of genealogy, have edited a valuable encyclopedic research tool of Jewish resources and have provided the methodology for access. Although the complete table of contents of the Guide may be viewed online through the Library of Congress catalog: <http://catalog.loc.gov/>, access to the information becomes slightly more difficult due to the fact that the Guide is lacking an index.

The text is divided into four sections. Part I, *The Essentials of Jewish Genealogical Research*, includes a chapter entitled *In the Art of the Interview* by Bill Gladstone. His sample questionnaire provides us with the essential skills to extract long forgotten recollections and memories from aging relatives. In addition, Gary Mokotoff's *Shtetl Geography* provides maps of Eastern and Central Europe that indicate the changes in territorial boundaries before World War I to the present time.

Part II, *Topical Section*, discusses how to track the migratory routes and records of emigrants from Europe, and how to research burial records on the JOWBR: www.Jewishgen.org/databases/cemetery.

Although Part III, *U.S. Research*, deals exclusively with American resources, it would be advantageous for Canadian researchers to access the records of the Library of Congress: <http://catalog.loc.gov/> and the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research: <http://www.yivoinstitute.org/library>.

In Part IV, *Researching Country of Ancestry*, each chapter is written by an expert on a specific geographic area, and contains a brief history of Jewish life, addresses of state historical institutions, online databases for archival research and extensive bibliographies. From countries such as Norway with a sparse Jewish population to the densely populated Jewish communities in Russia, Poland and the Ukraine, the Guide includes a multitude of resources. In addition, we savour the scents of the spice and silk markets as we learn about the exotic history of the Jews of India and China. In the chapter entitled, Austria, Henry Wellisch creates a vivid picture of Austrian Jewry dating from the thirteenth to the twentieth centuries and provides information to access Viennese genealogical resources such as statistical records, and Jewish and Public re-

cords at the LDS (Mormon Family History Library): http://www.familysearch.org/Eng/Library/FHL/frameset_Library.asp

If you have encountered insurmountable problems or exhausted all avenues of research, the Guide suggests that it may be helpful to hire a professional genealogist. Appendix B lists two professional organizations in North America that have granted certification to candidates who meet the requirements. A list of professionals may be searched at:

Board for Certification of Genealogists:
www.BCGCERTIFICATION.ORG

International Commission for the Accreditation of Professional Genealogists: www.ICAPGEN.ORG

Although *The Avotaynu Guide to Jewish Genealogy* was published in 2004, it represents a major reference work with valuable resources that are relevant and comprehensive for the Jewish genealogist.

Producing a Quality Family History

If you are in the initial stages of gathering data for your family history or in the final stages of completing your writing, a “must-read book” is *Producing a Quality Family History* by Patricia Law Hatcher. She provides us with a precise and comprehensive step-by-step outline that enables us to write, organize and publish even when the copious numbers of records, documents, photographs, and maps may prove to be both baffling and overwhelming.

Hatcher suggests that our goals should be realistic and we should not tackle a project that will sacrifice quality. She also stress the importance of accuracy, documentation, and clarity of writing style and recommends the “write-as-you research approach” rather than leaving the writing until all the information has been collected. In addition, we are made aware of the importance of “book design”. For example, the structural components of the front matter (title page, table of contents, acknowledgements) and the back matter (glossary, bibliography, indices) are clearly outlined.

Hatcher also strongly advises that we do not edit or proof-read our own manuscripts. “Get outside help.” She continues to explain that camera-ready art (final copy before submission to the printer) must be prepared with meticulous care in order to create a quality family history.

Another important factor to consider is publication and printing. Since most family histories are self-published, it becomes necessary to consider the many options that are available for printing (printing house, offset printing, local copy shop).

Hatcher emphasizes the fact that the genealogist must learn the business aspects of financing, marketing and distribution.

At the end of each chapter the “getting help” section provides additional resources for more detailed research, and we find the extensive bibliographies and indices most useful.

As genealogical researchers, our aim is to produce a quality family history that succeeding generations will cherish.

Hatcher’s manual provides us with the resources and skills for guaranteed success.

Report on Internet Resources Workshop

By Harvey Glasner

On October 26, Neil Richler of our Society conducted a very informative workshop on effectively using internet resources to further family research.

Neil pointed out that there are a growing number of database resources available on the net for genealogists. As well, there are many tools that a researcher can make use of, such as free net-based sources like <http://sourceforge.net/projects/pdfcreator/>, Wikipedia <http://en.wikipedia.org> and Google Maps <http://maps.google.ca>

Another free resource is: http://genealogy.about.com/od/research_tools/Genealogy_Research_Tools_Software_Forms_Maps_and_Calendars.htm

Besides these tools, there are numerous discussion groups or BLOGS that are genealogy-specific. The best ones have been around for many years and are highly reliable as they have been peer-reviewed and critiqued. Here are some good examples:

Blogs / Newsletters:

Cyndi's List <http://www.cyndislist.com/>

Eastman Online <http://blog.eogn.com/>

Tracing the Tribe <http://tracingthetribel.blogspot.com/>

Avotaynu / Nu? What's New ?

<http://www.avotaynu.com/nu.htm>

Genealogue <http://www.genealogue.com/>

Since the advent of the internet as a medium for widespread public use, substantial amounts of data have been put online by government agencies, private enterprises, public archives, newspapers (*Canadian Jewish Review* http://multiculturalcanada.ca/mcc_cjr), etc.

Remarkable breakthroughs are now possible by going to free sites such as <http://www.ellisland.org/>. Fee-based sites such as Ancestry.com have been able to compile an incredible amount of data from government and private sources. Esoteric information such as border crossings (Canada and the U.S.) can be easily obtained from Ancestry as well as ship records, directories and so on.

When you are using internet databases, you should keep in mind that spelling is often very different from what you expect it to be, for example Acker spelled as Aker, and names of family members may be very hard to read.

Here are some suggestions as to where you can get started in your search:

Records of Ontario births/deaths/marriages

Records of Quebec births/deaths/marriages

WorldVitalRecords.com

<http://www.worldvitalrecords.com/>

Here are some great tools to make searching easier:

Stephen Morse <http://www.stephenmorse.com/>

Google <http://www.google.com>

When you are using search engines such as Google, it is a good idea to become versed in how these invaluable devices work. You should become familiar with the use of quotations and "wildcards" in order to optimize your search. For example, putting in a middle name or initial will eliminate a lot of extra-

neous names i.e. "Michael J. Fox" rather than Michael Fox. Neil also talked about the importance of organizing the data that you are able to find online:

Directory structure

What type of file formats to use? PDF, JPG

Digitizing data you already have

Pictures and documents

Videos

Audio

Viewing with programs like Picasa

Backing up data - use of online back-up services such as Mozy www.mozy.com

It is a good idea to have:

An external hard drive

A second computer

Another computer at another location

CDs / DVDs

Neil commented on the use of genealogy software such as Family Tree Maker (their pluses and minuses) as well as publishing online through sites such as Facebook and/or launching your own family website. Be careful as to what you share and always be cognizant of protecting privacy.



Instructor, Neil Richler, with eager students

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