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שם טוב

SHEM TOV

JEWISH GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY OF CANADA (TORONTO)

Celebrating 25 Years: 1985 - 2010

VOLUME XXVII No. 3

September 2011 Elul 5771 - Tishrei 5772

CHESHVAN IS INTERNATIONAL JEWISH GENEALOGY MONTH: 2011 AWARD-WINNING POSTER BY JILLIAN BEROZA

“My inspiration came from the idea that Jewish Genealogy needed a fresh look for 2011 and needed to break the stereotypes. There needed to be an image that didn’t leave out a specific sect of Jews and gives a nod to the new paths of genealogy.

I felt that the symbol of the tree is a very standard look and so... I gave it a new twist, LITERALLY!

The tree symbolizes the tall and ever growing family trees that we have. The twisting of tree is to represent both the DNA double helix and the combining of ALL of our family trees...

Genealogy is pretty cool stuff, let’s make it stand out!!!”
From Jillian Beroza, Artist and Member of Jewish Genealogy Society of Long Island



// EXPLORING ROOTS
// BRANCHING OUT
// CONNECTING FAMILIES



INTERNATIONAL
JEWISH GENEALOGY MONTH

Cheshvan 5772 • October 29 to November 26, 2011
www.iajgs.com



Submitted by  Jewish Genealogy Society of Long Island Designed by Jillian Beroza

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Message From the President

Dear JGS members,

There is much to be excited about in the coming months. Les Kelman and his Program Committee once again have planned some wonderful workshops and have recruited an excellent roster of speakers. Please refer to p. 3 for forthcoming programs; be sure to also check our website for times and locations of our events since in the near future, we intend to try out other venues for our meetings besides the Shaarei Shomayim Synagogue.

Our Society's book project, publication of *Tracing Our Roots, Telling Our Story*, is coming to completion. As of the writing of this message, we were sending the manuscript to the printer for final corrections and printing so, please order your copy(ies) to take advantage of the generous discount we are offering members. An order form can be found on the back page of this issue of *Shem Tov* as well as on our website.

Please mark **Sunday, October 16th** on your calendar as a very important date: we will be officially launching our book at the North York Central Library Auditorium, 2nd floor, 5120 Yonge Street, Toronto, from 7:00 to 9:00 pm. This event will be a tribute to the contributors and volunteers who worked so hard to successfully complete this magnificent collection of memoirs and family stories.

Shelley Stillman and her committee spent many, many hours working over the summer to complete the indexing of all of the past issues of *Shem Tov*, including our original newsletter. This was a gargantuan task that will now allow genealogists throughout the world to search articles in our past publications. Bravo to all of the members of the Indexing Committee and to our student intern, Sara Tatelman!

I would like to give special mention to our *Shem Tov* Editor, Judy Kasman. *Shem Tov* in many respects is the glue that holds our Society together. Having had the privilege of sharing the editing duties a couple of years ago with Judy, I fully appreciate how much work is required to produce a quarterly bulletin and I thank Judy for her tireless work. I can tell you that it is no small task to assemble articles, write, edit, proof-read and get the copy to the printer on time. I would also like to acknowledge the expertise of *Shem Tov*'s layout professional, Dulcey Hoffman. I truly believe that *Shem Tov* is one of the best newsletters in the IAJGS family and deserves to be recognized as such.

So as is traditional at this time of year, I wish you and your families a healthy *Shana Tova*, and good fortune in your family research over the coming months.

Warm regards,
Harvey Glasner

vol. XXVII No. 3

SHEM TOV is published quarterly by the Jewish Genealogical Society of Canada (Toronto) and is distributed free to members. Current issues are available to non-members for \$4.00 per issue, back issues (with a one-year lag) are available free of charge on our website: www.jgstoronto.ca.

Contributions are invited. Please submit material to shemtov@jgstoronto.ca or to Shem Tov Editor, P.O. Box 91006, 2901 Bayview Avenue, Toronto, ON M2K 2Y6. Publication is at the Editor's discretion.

The Jewish Genealogical Society of Canada (Toronto) was founded in 1985. Membership is \$40 per calendar year, \$18 for students. Meetings are held September to June, usually on the last Wednesday of each month. Programme details, including topic, speaker and location, can be found on our website. Guests are always welcome (\$5).

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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UPCOMING EVENTS

Programmes at Sha'arei Shomayim Synagogue,
440 Glencairn Avenue, unless otherwise noted.

Doors open at 7:30 pm for 8 pm programmes.

Be sure to visit www.jgstoronto.ca for updates.

All events are free to members, \$5.00 for non-members.

Wednesday, September 21st at 8 p.m.

Congregation Habonim, 5 Glen Park Avenue, Toronto

How to Create a Family History Book – easily, inexpensively and with flexibility, on your own computer, using programmes you already have.

Speaker: **Merle Kastner** of JGS Montreal

Sunday, October 16th from 7 to 9 p.m.

North York Central Public Library Auditorium,

5120 Yonge Street, 2nd floor

Book Launch: *Tracing Our Roots, Telling Our Stories*, JGS Toronto's anthology

Please see notice on p. 11

Sunday, October 23rd from 10 a.m. to noon

Presentations by Marian Press

Blogs and Genealogy: Reading Them and Creating Them

Blogs, which are simply chronologically arranged web pages, have been heavily adopted by family historians, both as a means of sharing news about genealogy resources and happenings, and as a way to share family information.

Wikis: Developing Genealogical Information Tools

A wiki is a web site that allows multiple users to add, edit and contribute content collectively – text, images, web links and more. The technology has been adopted for a number of genealogical applications

Marian Press, MLS, MA, is a librarian at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto. She is a frequent speaker at genealogical workshops and conferences and writes regularly for *Internet Genealogy* and *Family Chronicle*. She has recently published *Education and Ontario Family History: Resources for Genealogists and Historians*, OGS/Dundurn Press, 2011. She has been doing her own family history for 25 years and has 99% Scottish ancestry with one Irish and one Scottish line.

Thursday, November 17th at 8 p.m.

Breaking Through Brick Walls

Michael Goldstein, President of IAJGS and professional genealogist, will tell us about puzzles he has solved, and possibly find some breakthroughs in yours. Attendees are invited to e-mail descriptions of brick walls that they would like tackled at the meeting to brickwalls@jewishgenealogysearch.com

Wednesday, December 14th at 8 p.m.

How to Make a "Family" Video

(Memories of Moshe, My Dad, My Hero)

Presenter: **Barbara Borenstein**

Canadian Census

Dear fellow genealogists:

I just had an enlightening conversation with the Honorable Yoine Goldstein on the subject of the release of further Canadian censuses and their various formats:

Here is what he suggests that we do:

1. send a letter to: acting leader of the opposition - Nycole Turmel, NDP Party
2. Bob Rae (leader of the Liberal Party of Canada)

The letter should outline the reasons why censuses are of prime importance to genealogists and that by discontinuing their distribution, they are doing a great disservice. This, in addition to leaving certain vital questions off the list for mandatory responses.

Included with this letter should be a copy of the article which appeared in *The Economist*, June 2, 2011:

<http://www.economist.com/node/18772674>

Former Senator Goldstein told me to include the fact that he advised me to use his name as a reference.

We are requesting your written support of this letter, as this issue concerns all genealogists.

With best regards,

Merle Kastner

Jewish Genealogical Society of Montreal

VP & Program Chairman

merlek@videotron.ca

MISSING LINKS

I am trying to trace my relatives, 2 sisters from Vitebsk, who fled to Canada in 1937 (possibly until 1940). Sarah and her sister (I don't know her name, possibly Anna/Channa) left their parents' home in Vitebsk. Their maiden name may have been Shapiro or Voikhansky.

In Vitebsk, they lived in the house of my great grandfather, Haim Ber Voikhansky, at 2 Slobodskay Lane/ #11. This was before WWII.

All of the family were tanners and had tanneries in Vitebsk and in Riga, Latvia. They lived in the same house as Semion (who was born in 1881), the son of Haim, with his wife, Bella Abramovna, and their 2 children, Yeruchim and Shifra; Semion's sister - a widow, Lana Shapiro (nee Voikhansky), and twin sisters Rosa and Basia Voikhansky, who were born in 1892. Perhaps Haim Ber had other children.

I think that the 2 sisters were the daughters of the widow, Lana Shapiro, and they were born around 1911 or 1912.

The sisters were forced by their uncle, Semion Vaikhansky, to join the Communist party and therefore they escaped to Canada. They got married in Canada and had children. Any information will be relevant for me.

That all the information I know. Thank you very much for your help,

Dror Vaikhansky, Israel

If you have any information for Dror, please write to shemtov@jgstoronto.ca

Exhibit of Marc Chagall and the Russian Avant-Garde Coming to the Art Gallery of Ontario

The Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) in Toronto will be hosting the sole North American exhibition called *Chagall and the Russian Avant-Garde: Masterpieces from the Collection of the Centre Pompidou, Paris*. This exhibit, organized by the Centre Pompidou, opens on October 18 and will run until January 15, 2012.

As stated in the release from the AGO, “Marc Chagall emigrated to Paris from Belarus, and while most famous for his dream-like, richly coloured imagery, his body of work also includes a focus on his Jewish ancestry and portrays his life and family from his childhood. Chagall was called ‘the quintessential 20th century Jewish artist’ by famed critic Robert Hughes.” Among this collection of one hundred eighteen pieces of art will be thirty-two works by Chagall and eight by Wassily Kandinsky.

Peter Goddard, in the *Toronto Star*, August 6, 2011, writes about his conversation with Elizabeth Smith, the AGO’s executive director of curatorial affairs. “Where Chagall’s fascination with ballet was central to Grenoble’s exhibition, the AGO ‘will play up the Jewish subtext’ in his life’, says Smith. Paris, where he settled in 1910 after leaving St. Petersburg, ‘was a magnet for Jewish artists,’ continues the curator, due to increasing anti-Semitic rumblings in Russia, where certain cities required Jews to carry with them special permits.

Chagall’s arresting *Newspaper Vendor* (Le Marchand de journaux, 1914) came from a period when the painter found himself back in Russia and mostly confined to the Vitebsk area, in what’s now Belarus, following the outbreak of World War I. Jewish refugees poured in from all over, fearful of being caught alone and labeled as pro-German. In this claustrophobic milieu — Chagall paints it gray as phlegm — news was always dire.

The sky in the work is the wan dying red of an ember about burnt out, the artist’s projection of Vitebsk’s future. The old bearded newspaper seller — a cubist construction down to the very shard-like newspapers he’s carrying, warning of the war — is weariness personified. The Parisian avant-garde meets Russia realities in this painting.

Paris shook up Chagall for all the right reasons. He painted nudes and flipped-out dreamscapes. He indulged in sumptuous (for him) colour in *The Studio* (1911), his first Paris painting made of his humble atelier in the Montparnasse district. Other Russian art émigrés also found a new sort of freedom. Alexej von Jawlensky’s colour chromatic dramatics in *Byzantinerin* (Pale Lips, 1913) met the flat patterns and hard colours of Fauvism (so-called ‘wild art’) head on.”



Included with admission to this special exhibit will be a performance by The Koffler Chamber Orchestra of *Chagall’s Musical World* on Sunday, November 20, 3:00 pm in the AGO’s Walker Court.

The Koffler Centre states: “Under the direction of ac-

claimed violinist, Jacques Israelievitch, the Koffler Chamber Orchestra is the only one of its kind in Toronto, comprising some of the city’s most well regarded professional musicians performing with community members and advanced music students. The program is inspired by the exhibition, *Chagall and the Russian Avant-Garde*, and features Chagall’s favourite composers, Mozart and Tchaikovsky, in addition to composers who share the painter’s Russian Jewish background. Chagall often depicted *klezmer* musicians and the milieu of Eastern European Jewish culture, reflected in the Kopytman composition. Like Chagall, Schnittke draws upon both tradition and the modes of modernity. The musician who gave its Canadian premiere, Andrew Burashko, reprises Schnittke’s Piano Concerto.

Program:

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Divertimento*

Alfred Schnittke, *Piano Concerto*

with soloist Andrew Burashko

Marc Kopytman, *Music for Strings*

Pyotr Ilych Tchaikovsky, *Serenade*

Presented with the Koffler Centre of the Arts. The Koffler Chamber Orchestra is made possible thanks to Leslie Dan and Family with additional support from Dorothy Shoichet.



For further information, go to www.ago.net

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Many of you will recall reading Harvey Glasner’s account of his trip to Newfoundland that appeared a few years ago in *Shem Tov*. Further to that article, we recently received the following email:

I just found your newsletter while googling some info about family history. You have probably long since heard back about Harvey Glasner’s September 2009 article “Finding Jews in Unexpected Places,” but if not I am afraid I must disappoint you - Saul White (born Solomon) was a Methodist, not a Jew. He was a moderately (locally) famous sea captain, fisher and sealer, and my great uncle. I suspect Ms. McGrath (mentioned in the article) is correct about the presence of the Magen David - it was commonly used in older Methodist and High Anglican church iconography.

Regards,

Greg Rose, Ottawa

BRANCHING OUT

A Child's Perspective on Genealogy Why My Family History Project was Important to Me

by Eden - Age -9 years

This article is based on the Family History project that was assigned in my Language Arts class. My project was very important to me because I learned about the members of my family -- my Great-Grandma Jeannie, Great-Grandpa Irwin, Great-Great-Grandma Mary, Great-Great-Grandpa David, Great-Uncle Ben, and of course my Grandma Elaine. I created a family tree of my ancestors. I saw how my family stayed close to each other even when they went through tough times. I was very excited to learn about my Great-Grandma Jeannie and my Grandma Elaine because they are both very interesting people. My top priority was to learn about my Great-Grandma Jeannie. I heard so much about her, and I was disappointed that I never met her.

One of the highlights of this project was studying my Great-Grandma Jeannie's birth certificate. Everyone in the family thought that her given name was Zelda, but since she did not like this name she changed it to Jean or Jeannie. However, the birth certificate confirmed that her given name was "Janie" i.e. Jean. Since her father's (my Great-Great-Grandfather David's) first language was Yiddish, her given name was incorrectly spelled in English. By coincidence, on May 18th, 2011, I discovered that the date of her birth was May 18th, 1908. We always thought that her birthday was in January. She would have been 103 years old. It was most interesting to see on the birth certificate that the name of the attending physician was not filled in. I could not believe that she was born at home. From this document, I learned that her address was on Taylor Street. I checked a 1907 map to see the area of Toronto where her family and perhaps other Jewish families lived. I feel a close connection to my Great-Grandma Jeannie because I am named after her. I learned that we share many of the same interests such as needlecrafts and shopping.

This project was very exciting and fun for me to research. Everything that I learned about my ancestors and grandparents is truly amazing! I feel closer to my great-grandparents and great-great grandparents after completing this project. I hope one day to pass on to my kids the many fascinating stories, photos and facts that I learned. These are my family's roots.

Eden is the granddaughter of JGS Toronto's Librarian, Elaine Cheskes.

NEW MEMBERS

JGS Toronto is very pleased to welcome
as new members:

Howard Goldford

Ronnie Lebi

Jonathan Milevsky

Branislav Mrdja

A Summer of *Shem Tov*

by Sara Tatelman

I'm sure you've imagined as many times as I have what your Great-Great-Grandmother Chaya was like. Sure, you might have the census records, her vital statistics, even an old photograph or signature, but that only tells you so much. And so you imagine -- was she brilliant? Hardworking? A great cook? You have to invent because you'll never meet her but you can't imagine not knowing about your family. I've been making up stories about the mysterious branches in my family tree for a while, but now there's another group of people whose lives I'm imagining.

This summer, I've read and indexed every article in every issue of *Shem Tov*. While doing so, I've noticed the same names popping up over and over again, year after year. I've gotten used to their writing styles and research interests, and I've started to wonder what else they do, think and like. It's as if *Shem Tovians* are a family. We don't necessarily send each other birthday cards or even speak, and we're not all related by blood, but I want to know about frequent *Shem Tov* contributors just like I want to know about the relatives I've never met. And for us genealogists, that's the real definition of family, isn't it?

I've learned a great deal while indexing 23 years worth of newsletters, from websites I should browse and books I should read to why Russian Jews were sent to Winnipeg upon arrival in Canada (answer: the climates were the most similar). I'm sure my own research will benefit from this summer project, but I think discovering, or maybe just imagining, the *Shem Tov* community was the most exciting part of my indexing adventure.

As genealogists, we're in the pursuit of obscure information. We know how frustrating it is to look at roll after roll of microfilm, knowing that the name of the ship on which our grandparents sailed to Canada is in there, but also knowing the hours it will take to find that one word. Since we know firsthand the pains of sifting through poorly organized material, we ought to make information that we ourselves publish as easy to access as possible. And that's what the Indexing Committee and I hope to have accomplished this summer. You can now browse an updated list of categories, with articles listed under as many headings as appropriate. In addition, Arthur Ryman has worked his technological magic so readers can now search through all *Shem Tov* issues.

Now go forth to read, research and be merry!

Sara Tatelman is a second-year Classics and Theatre student at McGill University who this past summer volunteered for JGS Toronto as an intern.

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF JEWISH GENEALOGISTS'

31ST ANNUAL CONFERENCE

AUGUST 14TH-19TH, 2011 IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

I had the privilege of attending several days of the recent IAJGS Conference in Washington, D.C. First of all, I must commend the organizing team which worked for three years to mount this Conference for about 1,200 attendees, 22 of whom were from the GTA. It is a daunting task to arrange for all facets of such a huge event, including logistics, speakers, materials (including hard copies and flash drives), accommodations, refreshments, *minyanim*, and so much more that doesn't meet the eye.

D.C. is a great centre for genealogists, especially Americans, since it is the home to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), the National Archives and the Library of Congress. In addition, there are the U.S.'s Embassies, for some of which group excursions were arranged. So, as you can see, resources were not limited to the confines of the Grand Hyatt Hotel in the heart of the city.

Personally, I attended at the Israeli Embassy. Upon arriving there for our scheduled visit, each of the thirty or so people on our bus had to go through security, much like that when visiting the Knesset in Jerusalem. Once assembled inside, we were treated to a 30 minute talk by Galit Baram, Counselor, Public and Academic Affairs for the Embassy of Israel. She spoke about how initially, new settlers in Israel wanted to create a new strong identity, free of the shackles of their European past. However, since the early 1960s there has been a greater desire to forge links with the past, whether people are of ashkenazi or sephardic heritage: witness the *Shoreshim* (Roots) project that each child of Bar/Bat Mitzvah age must undertake to do. This talk was followed by questions and answers.

The inspiring opening Keynote address was given by Sara Bloomfield who, for over ten years, has been Director of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

At the Conference there was a large array of concurrent programming, suited to all levels and interests of genealogical research. I was able to attend a presentation about the state of Jewish life in seven pre-set-day Ukrainian communities. I also heard about the Litvak immigration to the United States in the first half of the 20th century, and the important role that many of these immigrants assumed as U.S. citizens.

I also attended presentations about Yad Vashem and the USHMM, where I heard about the latest information on what resources are available at these institutions respectively. Armed with what I had learned. I attended at the archives on the 5th floor of the USHMM to do some personal research.

In addition, I had a chance to meet with editors of the bulletins of some other JGSs and was able to have a very old marriage document translated from Cyrillic to English.

This is just a taste of what took place at this very busy event, a hub for Jewish genealogists worldwide. Certainly, each person's experience is unique depending on who he heard, what she saw, what relatives he found (or didn't find), what discoveries she made, who they bumped into or met for the first time.

I am certain that this Conference was a rewarding experience for all who attended.

Future AIJGS Conferences:

2012 Paris, France

2014 Salt Lake City, Utah

2013 Boston, Massachusetts

2015 Jerusalem (tentative)

Judy Kasman



Not having attended a IAJGS Conference since 2000 in Salt Lake City when we lived in Calgary, my wife Deana and I decided that with Washington so close to our new home in Toronto, we should not miss the opportunity to once again be smothered with the information and knowledge of our fellow Jewish genealogists. We remembered fondly the wealth of information that we obtained in Salt Lake City that year and the fellow researchers that we met and with whom we shared tales and hints.

As we realized the dates for the Conference were getting close, we enhanced our research and reviewed all of our notes in order to be properly prepared for the flood of opportunities that we knew would present themselves.

We weren't to be disappointed. Arriving in Washington early on Sunday morning, we immediately began our journey back into the past with our first presentation. From the Jews of Poland, archive resources in the Ukraine, Yizkor books, surnames, cemeteries, and the Beltway Bandits, the week was filled with exploration and information. Topics like mapping for genealogy, and even having our own research assistant for an hour at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), added more clues and tools for our quest to find our ancestors.

As Deana and I spent the week going from seminar to seminar, breakfast to lunch, and relative to researcher, we once again discovered both small and major jewels in our family

histories.

With over 1,200 fellow Jewish Genealogists and over a hundred presentations available, the week was never-ending. We shared our stories and our techniques. We renewed friendships and put faces to names we had only known on emails and websites. Most importantly, we renewed our fervent passion for research and our ancestry as we met and joined with so many of our fellow amateur and professional genealogists.

The IAJGS Conference once again fulfilled our expectations and I don't think it will be eleven years until we attend the next one.

Mel Fishman
JGS Toronto member



From left, Merle Kastner of JGS Montreal with our members, Deana & Mel Fishman at Canadian Birds of a Feather (BOF) table

FROM THE EDITOR

Your feedback on *Shem Tov* would be helpful in planning future issues. So let me know what articles you have enjoyed, what articles have been helpful in your research, and what things you would like to see in the future. Please send your comments to shemtov@jgstoronto.ca.

Also, please let me know if you have an article of interest or some information that you would like to share with your fellow JGS Toronto members.

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Please remember that all members with email addresses will be receiving *Shem Tov* (in glorious colour) by pdf only, commencing in January, 2012.

Judy Kasman
Editor, *Shem Tov*

Shem Tov Scanning and Indexing Project

By Shelley Stillman

The objective of this project was to put all of the issues of *Shem Tov* on JGS Toronto's website, update the index, and create a search feature; all of this was done in order to make it easier for visitors to our site to access articles that have appeared in *Shem Tov*.

Karen Chisvin, Cindy Kliaman, Howard Patlik and Bette Shifman scanned the back issues of *Shem Tov* which were then uploaded to our website by Arthur Ryman, our website administrator.

Elaine Cheskes, Harvey Glasner, Cindy Kliaman, Arthur Ryman, Bette Shifman, Shelley Stillman, Sara Tatelman and Henry Wellisch were the members of the indexing committee who contributed their expertise and time. They created a list of key words, edited the metadata, and added volume numbers for each issue. Arthur converted the data into searchable web pages.

A special thank you to Sara Tatelman, student intern, who spent over 60 hours working for JGS Canada (Toronto) this past summer. She read all of the issues of *Shem Tov* and then entered over 675 articles onto a spreadsheet, with headings including the title of the article and key words/topics such as Holocaust; country name; cemeteries and burials; books and periodicals; Jewish names; archives, libraries, etc., as well as the name of the author of each article.

This new index will allow the visitors to our Society's website to locate articles in *Shem Tov* under various headings. As well, there will be a search box for searches by topic. The index will link to the appropriate issue of *Shem Tov*.

The Indexing Project is now a new reason to visit our website, www.jgstoronto.ca.

History Detectives: PBS TV Show

by Judy Kasman

This past summer, the ninth season (consisting of 9 weekly episodes) of *History Detectives* was shown on PBS. In this show, the Detectives, namely 5 experts, conduct in-depth research into the history of specific items to determine if they are of American historical significance, such as letters, photographs, pieces of art...in short, anything! There are usually 3 investigative segments per one-hour episode.

Even though this season is now over, it is still well worth your time to go to www.pbs.org and search for *History Detectives*. There you can view all past episodes, and you can also see Web Exclusives.

What is relevant for genealogists is the section called *Detective Techniques*, under which there are such heading as: Archives, Genealogy, Historical Research, Military Research, Photographs and Preservation. And under Genealogy, there are further subheadings, such as Census Information and Oral History.

Perhaps in reading this online information you will acquire new skills and/or tips to assist you in your personal research.



Remembrance and Jewish Genealogy

Ask the Genealogist

by CAROLINE ULLMAN

On May 26, JAHSENA and the Jewish Federation of Edmonton hosted Helen Waldstein Wilkes author of *Letters From the Lost: A Memoir of Discovery*. Although she and her parents escaped from Prague in 1939 and came to Canada, their extended family remained in Czechoslovakia and perished in the Holocaust; letters from these relatives were saved by her father.

Helen finally came to read the letters in 1996 when she turned 60 and began a journey into her family's past. In her talk, she discussed the importance of remembering; of our responsibility to erase Hitler's work and to bring back to life, as it were, those that were lost in the Shoah. Without us to remember them, they can be lost with the passing of time and the passing of those who knew them.

This idea of remembrance is often the motivation for Jewish genealogists. Recently, Zalman Vaynshteyn asked JAHSENA for help in researching his past. His father, Yaakov Alter, escaped from the Brest Ghetto and never heard from his parents, three sisters, or grandparents again. Zalman did not know the names of his father's sisters because his father had found it too painful to speak of them.

We searched the on-line database at: www.yadvashem.org, and found many "Wajnsztejns". In the Brest ghetto, all Jews over the age of 13 were required to obtain identity papers, which included the names, ages, and the names and dates of birth of

their parents. After contacting the scholars who had archived the Brest ghetto documents, we were told that we were "lucky" because the Brest Ghetto Passport Archive was unique; photos were taken of all the passport applicants. After we narrowed down our search to a few names, we were able to obtain the documents from Yad Vashem.

Zalman learned that one of his father's sisters was named Ester and she was born in 1919. She was five years younger than Zalman's father. Her parents were named Alter Zalman and Liba. Liba was born in 1890 in Brest; her parents were Shmuel and Fraidla. Alter Zalman's parents were Alter and Dwojra Rejzla. Alter was born in 1872 and his parents were named Bracha and Leib. Dwojra Rejzla was born in 1872 and her parents were Shloma and Doba.

With this information, Zalman's grandson, Moshe Burg, is able to trace his family tree back six generations. Zalman now has the photographs, the signatures, and the fingerprints of his aunt, his grandparents, and his great-grandparents! He now knows that one of his father's sisters was named Ester and after comparing the photos, he is convinced that he sees a family resemblance (I saw the pictures – I see it too!) Although we weren't able to find his father's other two sisters yet (we think that they were married and are listed under their married last names), we haven't finished searching.

We haven't finished searching....

This article appeared in "Heritage", the Journal of the Jewish Archives and Historical Society of Edmonton and Northern Alberta. Summer 2011, Volume 13, No. 3 and is reprinted with permission of "Heritage" and of the author.

Red Star Line

In the December, 2009 issue of *Shem Tov*, there was an article about the Red Star Line ships which carried many emigrants from Antwerp, Belgium to North America. Here is the latest Red Star project:



DO YOU KNOW... THIS GIRL?

One hundred years ago, Red Star Line ships carried nearly three million emigrants on a journey to a new life in America. They came from throughout Europe, with Antwerp, Belgium as their final stop before landing on the shores of America.

Although millions traveled on the Red Star Line, the image of one young girl with her ticket in hand, has inspired an international search for her identity. The Red Star Line Museum in Antwerp asks, 'Do You Know This Girl?' and is offering those who participate the chance to win a trip for 2 to Antwerp.

Visit www.redstarline.org to help us find 'The Girl' and enter to win!

Housed in the original departure buildings, the Red Star Line Museum in Antwerp, Belgium will open in spring 2013 to bring the story of nearly three million Red Star Line passengers to life through exciting interactive exhibits. www.redstarline.org.



CITY OF ANTWERP



www.redstarline.org

North African Jews

In 1993, the late Robert Attal, scholar at the Ben Zvi Institute in Jerusalem, had written *The Jews of North Africa: A Bibliography*, and in 2009, a supplement by Attal was published. This newer version is now online and is searchable: [http://www.ybz.org.il/Uploads/dbsAttachedFiles/Attal.bib\(1\).pdf](http://www.ybz.org.il/Uploads/dbsAttachedFiles/Attal.bib(1).pdf)

As in the original version, the bibliography is divided into five parts: North Africa, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco. In each chapter, the Hebrew entry precedes the Latin letter entry, i.e. there are entries in French, English, Spanish, Portuguese German and Dutch.

CHECK OUR WEBSITE OFTEN!

Our website is chock-full of useful information and links. Please note that only the most recent two announcements are on our home page; the rest are under Our Society / Announcements.

Monthly programs for Polish Jewish Heritage Foundation are easily accessible by clicking on its link under Resources / Toronto.

Remember to visit www.jgstoronto.ca frequently for news and updates.

My Fifteen Grandmothers

by Genie Milgrom

Published in *Boletin Semanal Sefarad* (Sephardic Weekly Bulletin) #137

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Editor's note: Genie Milgrom's story is very compelling. I will summarize the introductory portion due to space constraints.

Genie Milgrom was born in Havana, Cuba in 1955 into an upper class Roman Catholic family of Spanish origin. In 1960, her family left Cuba for Miami where she was raised.

Genie attended fine Catholic schools but always felt that she had the strongest connections with those she met of Jewish origin, such as Rachel her seven year-old day camp friend, and others she met during high school. She learned much about Judaism from her college roommate at the University of Miami who had grown up in a Jewish home; this led her to study about theology and comparative religion with a nun at the University where her knowledge of Judaism increased.

Genie Milgrom writes:

I married very young at the age of 17. My life consisted of working full time in the family business, being a full time Mom, and a part-time student. At the age of 33, I picked up where I had left off and began to devour volumes of Jewish Books with diverse topics such as Halacha, the Holidays, Marriage, Shabbat, Philosophy and anything else I could get my hands on. I started visiting synagogues and going to an occasional service. I made many friends and had practically started a new life on the side but I could not share this with my ex husband. We divorced and I continued my quest. My son was 15 and my daughter was 3. For various reasons, I was unable to convert my children at the same time.

I now took the search and study in earnest. FINALLY, I was putting my soul and my body in alignment. I felt comfortable in synagogues. I felt and still feel great nostalgia or maybe a sort of *déjà vu* when I hear the prayers in shul bring chanted. I knew I was closer to home than I ever had been yet further than ever from the home and family I was raised in. They did not understand. My soul had stirred from a young age and all those around me had remained the same. Why was I so different? It was difficult and for various reasons, I was unable to convert my children at the same time.

I sat with the Rabbi of a small Orthodox synagogue near my home and he kindly explained that I could not be Jewish. He turned me away and away and away but finally allowed me to go to meet with the Beit Din (religious court). For several years I studied intently and finally converted. It was the moment of my greatest accomplishment yet I had practically no one to share it with. Friends do not come easy to someone in a conversion process. I could not look back and the road ahead seemed very lonely.

The path was hard. Keeping *Kashrut* in a home where the children craved what they had always eaten, not being able to eat in my parents' home, having to make adjustments right and left for the children with their activities on Shabbat and the holidays. It was not easy but I was so happy and so at home in my skin that I persevered.

A couple of years later I met my husband Michael whose family was a traditionally observant one originally from Rumania and we married. He completes my circle. Michael has the patience of a Saint (no pun intended). He has always been the rock that helps me when the going gets tough and when my past life clashes with my current life. Together, we raised my daughter in the best way that we could, given the unusual circumstances.

My maternal grandparents were from a small village on the banks of the River Duero, separating Spain and Portugal, named Fermoselle. My grandfather was born there and my grandmothers' grandmother was from there as well. They were second cousins. For years I tried to get them to help me make a family tree but all I got was a runaround. I was never able to get the family history from them. My grandmother knew I had converted and would often tell me how dangerous it was. How very dangerous it was that I had converted. I always thought she meant it was dangerous for my soul but realized only years later that she meant it was dangerous to be Jewish.

My maternal grandmother died on a Friday morning. On that morning, I saw my Mother who told me that the family tradition was to bury the dead immediately. I was shocked. What kind of tradition was that for a solid Catholic Family? No amount of begging did any good. My grandmother was buried on Saturday at a cemetery quite a distance away and I could not go given the fact that I observe the Sabbath. My grief was overwhelming. The following day, my family came to see me at my home. I was very surprised when they all came walking in. Frankly, I thought they would not speak to me ever again. My Mom placed a small box on the table and told me that my grandmother wanted me to have it on the day of her death. Inside, was an antique Hamsa and small gold earrings with a tiny Star of David in the center. Nothing else. No note, no commentary, just these two objects. I was overwhelmed at the significance.

In an instant, I got flashbacks of times in my life that I had seen and felt things, never putting two and two together that we could have been descendents of Marranos.

Sitting in that chair, holding that box, I remembered the shawl that had been placed over our shoulders during my first marriage, as an old family custom that is still in use today by Sephardim of placing a *tallit* over the shoulders of the couple. I remembered the times that my grandmother and I made huge amounts of desserts for the holidays, old recipes from the Village of Fermoselle, always *parve* and she would always take some of the dough, put it in aluminum foil and throw it in the oven. The times she would break eggs into a glass to check for blood before throwing it out, the way she always taught me to sweep the floor to the center of the room (An old Sephardic tradition to sweep away from the *Mezuzahs*).

It was a lot to take in, yet it made all the sense in the world. Clearly I understood the way my soul had searched and had yearned for something all of those years that was not logical. I

started my search for my Jewish roots. My grandfather left me a lot of the legwork done. Even though he did not give it to me while alive, he had meticulously hand written a family tree that jump-started my search back to the early 1800's. With that information in hand, internet resources and friends in Spain, blogs etc., I was able to go back perhaps two generations more and then I hit a brick wall. Not only was the wall brick, but the wall was Catholic. So far, I found nothing.

The search took me 4 years. During that time, I hired an ex-priest in Spain who was also a genealogist. I wanted the truth. I did not need someone to tell me what I wanted to hear. The man I hired wanted me to be Catholic. The match was perfect. He searched and researched the libraries, the Historical Museums and I validated the findings at each turn. I now have copies of documentation from every single grandmother going back 15 generations to 1545. I also have notarial records going even further back than that. In 15 generations no one in my family had left the village of Fermoselle. My grandfather was the first to leave. My mother, in fact, was the first to marry outside of the family. She did not marry a cousin.

My findings to date have yielded a rich tapestry of a Marrano or Judeo-Convert family. This task has not been easy but I now know it is not impossible. I had to untangle the threads that my family worked so hard at, illuminating the lies and deceit they had to live with to be able to survive. I have personally witnessed how they changed their names with each subsequent official document to avoid being discovered by the Inquisition. I have traced each and every single name on my tree. I have found that each name used by the Marranos was a Jewish name. I even found one name as owning a kosher butcher prior to 1492. Most of the names are typical names of Jews that were forced to convert. Topographical names, such as Ramos or Montaña, Flores. Names like Diez, Guerra and many others. I have located Inquisition records from the Tribunal files showing Jews of the same names accused of being Judaizantes or Jewish Observant within 5 km of the family village. I have matched the dates to match the family names.

My family tree is typical of the Crypto Jewish ones, not only because of the vast amount of cousin intermarriages but also because of the naming of the children and the repetition of the names from one generation to the next.

I am now in the process of documenting the Jewish History of Fermoselle, which has not been done to date. I want to set the record straight. I want to be the voice that my ancestors never had. Most of all, I just want others to know that this search is possible. Given the resources available in Spain and Portugal today, it can be done.

Today, I live a rich life in Miami together with my husband. I am very active in my synagogue and in the community. I now light an extra two candles on Friday night for my 15 grandmothers. One for those that couldn't light, and one for those that had forgotten they had to light. My Jewish family is quite numerous now, made up not only of hundreds of names on a family tree but a very close and tight knit group of friends who have become my Jewish family. To them I am grateful for always having been so supportive in my quest and for hearing my stories again and again. I am truly blessed. I have come home.

If you suspect that you may be a descendent of Crypto or Converso Jews (Marrano or *chueta*) from Spain or Portugal, you can contact Genie Milgrom at spanishancestry@aol.com.

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Continue to celebrate our 25th year as our 44 amazing member authors will be recognized in grand style for their contributions to this anniversary anthology.

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“TRACING OUR ROOTS, TELLING OUR STORIES” BOOK PROJECT ALREADY A ROARING SUCCESS!!!

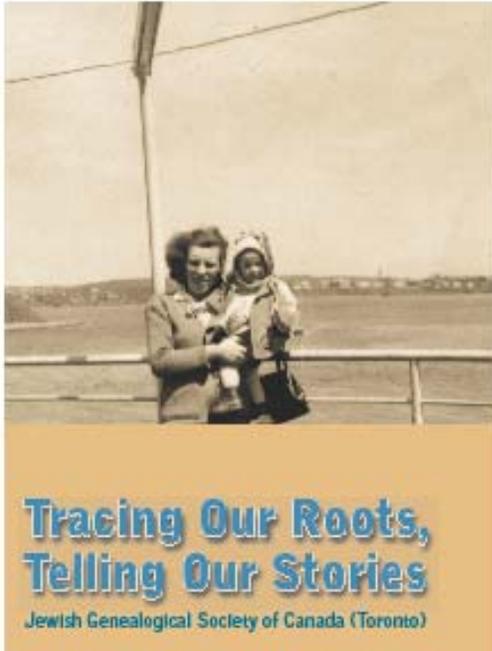
The 25th Anniversary Book committee is excited to announce that prior to the publication of *Tracing Our Roots, Telling Our Stories*, about 150 books have been pre-sold to members, contributors of articles, and their families. The committee worked hard with the editing team towards the completion of the book, with the goal of fulfilling these exclusive initial orders in September, in time for our New Year.

Don't delay – you can order books at the exclusive member price of only \$20.00. The purchase price for non-members is \$25.

To purchase a book (or books!), simply complete the Order Form on p.12 and mail it to JGS Toronto together with a cheque.

Celebrate 25 years of JGS of Canada (Toronto)!

Tracing Our Roots – Telling Our Stories



Tracing Our Roots is your society's Twenty-fifth Anniversary project. The book is an anthology of 45 compelling and entertaining contributions.

The themes include tales of research and discovery, escape, struggle, family reunion, growing up, lives led. Some will make you laugh, some will have you reminisce and a few may even make you weep.

The book will be available before the High Holy Days in late September 2011.

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