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שם טוב

# SHEM TOV

JEWISH GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY OF CANADA (TORONTO)

Since 1985

VOLUME XXVIII No. 4

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## AND THEY DIDN'T FALL ASLEEP

by Myrna Nearing Levy, JGS Toronto Member

“How long would you like me to talk?”

This was the question I posed to the program chair of a Toronto Hadassah chapter. We were discussing the final details of my October visit to a chapter meeting on behalf of JGS Toronto. I was invited to speak about some of the women's stories contained in our Society's anthology, *Tracing Our Roots, Telling Our Stories*.

Members of JGS Toronto's book committee have been accepting invitations to introduce the book to various groups around the city, ever since its publication one year ago. I had already spoken to a number of small groups, ranging from my own Hadassah chapter to a *chavurah* group from my synagogue. Usually the length of the program ranges from half an hour to forty-five minutes, with time for questions at the end. In spite of my experience with giving a presentation, I wasn't prepared for the answer to my question.

“It depends,” was the surprising answer. “If you are interesting, you can talk a little longer. If not, some of the women might fall asleep.”

A little background information is necessary. This Hadassah chapter is one of Toronto's oldest in terms of the number of years of its existence. It was always known as one of the most energetic and productive groups and is still actively engaged in fund-raising activities. Today most of its members are in their eighties, with some in their nineties. In fact, the meeting to which I was invited was held in the private dining room of an elegant retirement home where one of the members resides. She was hosting the luncheon served before the formal meeting.

So, it is understandable that some of the women might take a postprandial nap after lunch if they weren't fully engaged with what I had to say.

Thus forewarned and challenged, I chose stories that I hoped would keep my audience awake. I began with excerpts from *Yetta's Gift*, Sharon Singer's powerful description of her grandmother's voyage in the early 1900s from her native Kosov to London and on to Toronto, and some of her life once here. I could see a few of the women in the room nod their heads, not with sleep, but with the recognition that some of the story was familiar; their grandmothers might have had similar journeys.

They were charmed by the description Judith Ghert's grandmother wrote about her visit to Tel Aviv

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## Message From the President

It has been my honour to serve as your president for the past three years. We elect our new executive at the General Meeting on Dec. 12<sup>th</sup> at Temple Sinai. Following the election, our guest speaker, Varda Hall Berenstein, will deliver a talk, *Growing Up in Switzerland 1921-1949*. (See p. 3 for more details.)

I am delighted that most of our committee chairs and executive intend to continue in their roles for another year. However, we are still looking for candidates to hold the positions of Secretary and Vice President. I encourage prospective board members to contact me ([president@jgstoronto.ca](mailto:president@jgstoronto.ca) or 647-247-6414) if you have an interest in any executive position or chairmanship.

I extend my sincerest thanks to all of the people who have contributed so much over the last few years. Without your enthusiasm and hard work, we would not have been able to: successfully bring our book, *Tracing Our Roots, Telling Our Stories* (500 sold!), to fruition; document over 100,000 burials and send them to JOWBR; re-vamp our website, launch our blog; continue to produce our first-rate quarterly bulletin, *Shem Tov*; add to our library collection; organize and execute informative and well-attended programs and workshops, and send out speakers to various community organizations (all of which were well-publicized). Kudos to all the behind-the-scenes committee workers who often do not get the recognition that they deserve.

I wish to thank Sid Disenhouse who acted as our Treasurer for 3 terms. He has been a member almost from the founding of JGS Toronto and he graciously accepted the position again when we were in need.

There is still much to be done in order to meet the needs of our members over the coming years. Genealogy continues to grow in popularity and I'm sure that our executive and volunteers will always strive to ensure that all of our programming and endeavours are relevant to our membership. We are open to all ideas that will help to advance our goals.

Warm regards,  
Harvey Glasner

### From the Editor

Submissions to *Shem Tov* are always welcome. Share your items of interest, details of your latest genealogical discoveries, photos or research tips.

Remember too that each issue features *On A Personal Note*, an account of up to 1,500 words written by a JGS Toronto member. (See p. 4)

Please send your articles to **editor @jgstoronto.ca**. The next deadline is February 13<sup>th</sup>.

Judy Kasman

#### vol. XXVIII No. 4

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Contributions are invited. Please submit material to [shemtov@jgstoronto.ca](mailto: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

Please check [www.jgstoronto.ca](http://www.jgstoronto.ca)  
for details of each programme!

**Wednesday, December 12<sup>th</sup>, 8:00 pm**

Temple Sinai, 210 Wilson Avenue, Toronto

**Growing Up as a Jew in Switzerland, 1921-1949**

Presenter: Varda Hall Berenstein (see p. 9)

**Wednesday January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2013, 8:00 pm**

Temple Sinai, 210 Wilson Avenue, Toronto

**Searching for David Nowakowsky, Music of a Forgotten Master**

Presenter: Ron Graner, JGS Toronto member (see p. 9)

**Sunday, March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 10:00 am-12:30 pm**

Edithvale Community Centre, 131 Finch Ave. W, Toronto

**Workshop: Drowning In Data**

Presenter: Les Kelman and panel

**Wednesday, March 13<sup>th</sup>, 8:00 pm**

Temple Sinai

**Searching the All-Galicia Database & Gesher Galicia Map Room Online**

Presenter: Pamela Weisberger, President & Research Coordinator Gesher Galicia

**Wednesday, April 24<sup>th</sup>, 8:00 pm**

North York Central Library Auditorium

**The Jews in Poland and Russia**

Presenter: U of T Professor Antony Polonski

**Wednesday, May 29<sup>th</sup>, 8:00 pm**

Temple Sinai

**History of the Ottawa Jewish Community**

Presenters: John Diener and Hymie Reichstein

**Wednesday, June 19<sup>th</sup>, 8:00 pm**

Temple Sinai

**Brick Walls and Breakthroughs**

Presentations by our members

## Galicia Maven Pamela Weisberger Speaking on March 13<sup>th</sup>: Have We Got a Programme For You!

**P**amela Weisberger is the 1<sup>st</sup> vice president and programme chair of the Jewish Genealogical Society of Los Angeles; she is also president and research coordinator for Gesher Galicia, Inc. JGS Toronto is fortunate to be welcoming Pamela, a professional genealogist, to speak to our Society on the topic, *Searching the All-Galicia Database & Gesher Galicia Map Room Online*, on Wednesday, March 13<sup>th</sup> at Temple Sinai.

## JGS Toronto Workshop

by Debbie Sacrob

**N**eil Richler gave the novice searcher good grounding with his September 23<sup>rd</sup> workshop. He presented in user-friendly terms that everyone could understand. He outlined the various ways of beginning the family history search. He said that speaking to older family members is key in starting the initial process.

Tips that I found useful:

- When doing your research, note as much as you can about the source of your materials and information.
- Back up everything you put on the computer.

With computer research literally and figuratively at our fingertips, there is no limit to resources available. Neil's talk was site-specific: he gave his recommendations and the participants eagerly shared and exchanged sources and suggestions and approaches for researching. Genealogists share a curiosity. I am inspired watching and listening to all of this sharing.

Neil went further with his discussion and recommendations of software. He stated that both PCs and Macs have excellent family tree programs. He strongly urged his audience to investigate the traditional programs and those offered online for genealogy and for back-up of data.

There was also a presentation by Ruth Burkholder which was informative, giving a broad overview of genealogical research.

I personally find it inspiring to listen to these people talk about what they do. This is one program that I think everyone should take the opportunity to attend.

### And They Didn't Fall Asleep - continued from Page 1

in 1935, and gripped by hearing Natty Yegudin's account of sitting in a safe room in her apartment in Israel with her mother and grandmother, a Holocaust survivor, while wearing a gas mask during Operation Desert Storm.

Ben Schlesinger's account of how his stepmother, Gisi, used her wits to shepherd him and his stepbrother in 1939 from Berlin to Brussels, Paris, Lisbon and finally Montreal in 1941 had my audience awake and engaged.

I included stories that told about involvement with Hadasah, whether it was the women of Melfort, Saskatchewan that Pearl Kazdan wrote about in *A Prairie Vignette*, or Dinah Saf-rati's report of the recollection of her great-grandmother, Jean Mouckley Creed Gluckstein, of the Hadassah Bazaar at the CNE grounds that was quoted in *Yichus*.

And so the program continued. Over this past year, I have come to realize that the real importance of introducing our book to a group goes beyond hoping to sell a few copies at the end. The fundamental message that I wanted to leave with these women is that they, too, have stories to tell and that our organization is prepared to welcome them and assist them in beginning this process. This, I told them, as I ended my talk, was the "commercial."

As I concluded, I was relieved to notice that all the women were still awake.

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## ON A PERSONAL NOTE

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### Closing Some Gaps

by Isme Bennie

Part I of a 2-part series

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I started off trying to solve a problem, actually two connected problems, and while I learned many interesting facts en route, I never found the solution. But as I checked into archival sources, I would go off on tangents, taking a quick look for information about some other family member, and the process took me to closure on another front!

I had started a family tree. I knew my maternal grandmother's Jacobson family came from Latvia and as I started placing Jacobson relatives into the tree, I couldn't figure out how Auntie Amalia and "poor Lilly" who sold hosiery in a Johannesburg department store, fitted in. I knew they were part of my South African Jacobson family.

I went to look at old photographs and post cards. I read again the letters sent by my great-uncle Meyer from the Gulag to my mother in South Africa, and set off to document these two missing connections.

I started by contacting two elderly cousins here in Toronto, but they knew little about Lilly or Amalia's origins. They did know, as did I, that Lilly Jacobson eventually married and her married name was Weinbren.

I tried another family connection. My mother somehow knew that we had a relative in Newcastle-On-Tyne in the UK, a wealthy businessman, a great-uncle or cousin called Lionel Jacobson.

Lionel Jacobson had endowed a Jewish Community Centre in Newcastle. I emailed its director who put me together with Lionel's son, Malcolm. I find from his family tree that we are related because my great-grandfather Moritz and his grandfather Moses were brothers. Moritz and Moses had siblings: Benno, who became a playwright in the US, and Adolph, Jacob, and Ida, all who settled in the UK, coming from Libau (Liepaja), Latvia via Hamburg.

Malcolm told me that Moses, or Mo, who left Libau in 1887, aged seventeen, had worked in a fireworks factory in Hamburg for two years before going to New York. In 1896, he joined his siblings in Newcastle, age twenty-seven, with 15s 6d in his pocket and started a men's outfitter that later became part of a huge British clothing enterprise. Mo married Annie (Hannah Mary) Lerman in 1899, and fathered three sons. He died six days after returning from a trip to South Africa in February 1939, the same year his brother Moritz died in Libau.

I was able to substantiate some of this UK Jacobson family history. I found from Ancestry.com Shipping and Naturalization records that Moses, born 27 September 1871, arrived in New York in March 1888, went to the U.K. in 1896, but got his US Naturalization papers in 1897. I found his 1899 marriage details at StocktonRoots.co.uk, and the 1901 England Census lists him born 1871, aged 30 in 1901.

There was no sign of an Amalia or a Lilly on Malcolm's family tree! There is however a note on it that after his first

wife Berta died in 1935, my great-grandfather Moritz Jacobson remarried and his second wife was Klara.

As I searched the Latvia databases for information about Lilly and Amalia, more details started emerging about my great-grandfather Moritz from Libau, in what was then Courland.

I found (from the 1892 Libau Address Book, Trade, Commerce and Industry, List of 1st and 2nd Guild members) that Moritz Jacobson was a manufacturer in Libau. His M. Jacobsohn & Co. was located at Neumartt 9, in a busy commercial area in the centre of the town.

This past June, I travelled to Libau/Liepaja and looked for this address, but Neumartt, the market square, was replaced with a Rose Garden in 1910. It is now Rose Square, and though a number 9 exists, there is no way of knowing if this was actually the site of M.J. and Co's place of business.

I know from family correspondence and photographs that Meyer David, Moritz' son-in-law, was married to my great-aunt Necha, known as Nany, one of Moritz' five children, and the one who had remained in Latvia. I know from Meyer's correspondence that he was a banker with the Savstarpiga Kreditbiedriba, the Mutual Creditbank, in Libau at Liela iela 9, phone number 861. And from the 1940 Libau telephone book, I found that he and Nany were living at Dzintaru 3, phone number 238. Meyer also owned several other properties in Libau, listed in the Old Liepaja/Libau Property Owners List of 1938.

During my visit to Liepaja, I went to Dzintaru iela, a street known for its art nouveau architecture, and found the house Meyer and Nany lived in. It is dilapidated but occupied, and the neighborhood - what would have been a good residential neighborhood - has a feeling of tired elegance.

I tried to imagine Meyer walking, or driving, from this house to his bank at Liela iela 9. Today that is the address of the Holy Trinity Lutheran Cathedral, built in 1758. Street numbers have changed. His bank would likely have been opposite, still a banking area. He also owned property at nearby number 5.

But several decades before, in 1912, he and his brother Rafael were listed in the *Baltische Verkehrs-und adressbuch* (1912 Baltic Traffic and Address Book) as being the owners of David and Co, enamelware on Seestrassse 12. Meyer was also listed in 1912 as being the owner of a business selling dishes and lamps on Kornstrassse 49.

Quite a few Jews started banks and credit institutions in the period between the two World Wars, and Meyer might have seized the opportunity to start his discount bank and to grow his real estate holdings.

His brother Rafael also changed his occupation. According to the 1930 Libau Business and Property Owners List, at Jekaba 9, which he owned with Meyer, Rafael manufactured confectionary called Landrin, a brand originally established in St. Petersburg in 1848 and one of the Emperor's favorites. Rafael's wife was Amalia, but I couldn't find a connection to the Amalia of my search.

According to the 1912 Baltische directory, Boris (Behr), Meyer's father, worked or resided at Weidenstrassse 9, and

*Continued on page 5*

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## Closing Some Gaps - continued from page 4

owned Thomastrasse (Toma iela) 36.

From Holocaust survivor documentation from the Yad Vashem Central Database of Jewish Victims' Names, I knew about two other and much later addresses on that same street: Toma 61-2 (Rafael's) and Toma 64 (Meyer's). Both brothers must have been forced to move there after the Nazi occupation in 1941!

None of this connected me yet to Lilly or Amalia, but I kept going.

*The author is a resident of Toronto whose family roots are in Latvia.*

*Part II will appear in the next issue of **Shem Tov**.*

*Send your story of up to 1,500 words for On a Personal Note to [shemtov@jgstoronto.ca](mailto:shemtov@jgstoronto.ca)*



Neil Richler, proud to see *Tracing Our Roots, Telling Our Stories* displayed with the array of books in the Judaica section of Chapters at Bayview Village Shopping Centre, took this photo.

### How to Buy *Tracing Our Roots, Telling Our Stories*



### Tracing Our Roots, Telling Our Stories

Jewish Genealogical Society of Canada (Toronto)

The book is available for purchase for \$25 online through <http://www.familychronicle.com/books.htm> It also may be purchased at these GTA stores:

- Aleph Bet on Bathurst Street
- Chapters, Bayview Village

Books are sold at JGS Toronto programmes for \$20 (members' price).

### NEW MEMBERS

JGS Toronto is very pleased to welcome as new members:

Arthur Ameis	Fern Sanders
Carol Shamoon	Leonard West

### SHEM TOV WANTS YOU!

Send your stories, recollections, discoveries and photos to *Shem Tov*!

Deadline for the next issue is February 13<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

Your comments and feedback are also welcome.  
[shemtov@gmail.com](mailto:shemtov@gmail.com)

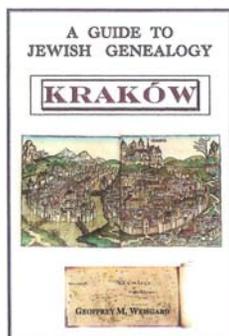
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## BRANCHING OUT

by Elaine Cheskes

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**New Acquisitions to the JGS of Canada (Toronto) Library Collection at the Gladys Allison Canadian Room, North York Central Library, 5120 Yonge Street, 6<sup>th</sup> floor**



***Kraków: A Guide to Jewish Genealogy.*** Geoffrey M. Weisgard in association with Geshar Galicia. England: Geoffrey Weisgard, 2011.

Reviewed by Elaine Cheskes

Is it possible to describe a book of 113 pages as encyclopedic? Weisgard, in association with the Special Interest Group (SIG), Galicia Geshar, has successfully created this phenomenon. For those who are searching their Jewish roots in the former Austrian province of Galicia, but specifically in Kraków, this book is invaluable.

Although the text of the Guide is easy-to-understand, the structure is rather unusual. Weisgard explains his logic: "Normally a history book or a biography starts at an earlier time and proceeds forwards to the future. We genealogists work the other way round." Furthermore, an index would have provided easier access to the content.

For the researcher, a wide range of references is included in the Guide. The genealogical information from these sources is linked to relevant historical periods and Kraków is viewed in the larger perspective as part of Poland. Weisgard cites some of the most significant databases:

Geshar Galicia: [www.jewishgen.or/galicia](http://www.jewishgen.or/galicia)

Jewish Records Indexing – Poland: [www.jewishgen.org/jri-pl](http://www.jewishgen.org/jri-pl)

Shoreshim site: [www.shoreshim.org/en/default.asp](http://www.shoreshim.org/en/default.asp)

The Shtetlinks Jewishgen website for Kraków:

[www.shtetlinks.jewishgen.org/krakow](http://www.shtetlinks.jewishgen.org/krakow)

The Polish State Archives: [www.archiwum.krakow.pl/english](http://www.archiwum.krakow.pl/english)

The University of Kraków [www.bj.uj.edu.pl](http://www.bj.uj.edu.pl)

In addition, he includes many lesser known and obscure sources that may provide documentation about the Jewish community of Kraków, such as; personal memoirs, organizations, the press, census returns, and directories.

Many reference books about Kraków accompany each chapter. The eminent historian, Prof Majer Bałaban who wrote *Historia Żydów w Krakowie i na Kazimierzu, 1304-1868* (Kraków, 1931) describes Jewish life in Galicia and Kraków.

Although this resource has not been translated into English, it includes a detailed name index whereby the researcher who succeeds in finding his family name can proceed directly to the text even though it requires interpretation. "It is virtually impossible to consider Kraków in the Holocaust period without coming across the name Oscar Schindler. Elinor J. Brecher's book, *Schindler's Legacy - True Stories of the List Survivors*, is devoted to some three dozen individuals and their families."

Weisgard and Galicia Geshar's *Kraków: A Guide to Jewish Genealogy* is a genealogical treasure for the Krakówian researcher to explore.

Geoffrey M. Weisgard. *Kraków: A Guide to Jewish Genealogy* (England: Geoffrey Weisgard, 2011). 8.

Geoffrey M. Weisgard, *Kraków: A Guide to Jewish Genealogy* (England: Geoffrey Weisgard, 2011), 23.



### Genealogical Journals/Newsletters

Genealogical journals and newsletters published by the numerous international Jewish genealogical societies provide the most up-to-date resources for the researcher. Forthcoming conferences, family history articles, the latest publications and significant websites are included in their contents.

JGS Toronto continues to receive paper copies of our journal and newsletter subscriptions for our Library collection and often displays them at our Society's programmes. However, many of these journals may be accessed in pdf format from your own computers. While current issues are only available to registered members of those societies, previous issues may be read online.

#### **Journals - Online and Available for Downloading**

*Avotaynu* - International Review of Jewish Genealogy

[www.avotaynu.com](http://www.avotaynu.com)

2,900 articles extracted from 1985-2011

\$35.00 annually for online subscription

*Dorot* - Journal of the Jewish Genealogical Society (New York City)

[www.jgsny.org/dorot](http://www.jgsny.org/dorot)

Summer 1979-Winter 2008

*Mass-Pocha* - Journal of the Jewish Genealogical Society of Greater Boston

[www.jgsbg.org/mass-pocha.html](http://www.jgsbg.org/mass-pocha.html)

Sample pages of past newsletters

*Continued on page 7*

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**Genealogical Journals/Newsletters - continued from page 6**

**Mishpacha** - Journal of the Jewish Genealogical Society of Greater Washington  
[www.jsgsw.org/mishpacha](http://www.jsgsw.org/mishpacha)  
Irregular years 2002-2011

**Sharsheret Hadorot** - Journal of the Israel Genealogical Society  
[www.isragen.org.il](http://www.isragen.org.il)  
Electronic copies of previous issues available

**Shem Tov** - Newsletter of the Jewish Genealogical Society of Canada (Toronto)  
[www.jgstoronto.ca/index.php/newsletter-mainmenu-49](http://www.jgstoronto.ca/index.php/newsletter-mainmenu-49)  
After a one year period, current issues are moved to the [Bac Issue Index](#)

**Shemot** - Journal of the Jewish Genealogical Society of Great Britain  
[www.jsgsb.org.uk/shemot](http://www.jsgsb.org.uk/shemot)  
Index of contents, 2003-2011

**ZichronNote** - Journal of the San Francisco Bay Area Jewish Genealogical Society  
[www.zichronnote.sfbayjgs.org](http://www.zichronnote.sfbayjgs.org)  
Irregular years 1981-2011 (excluding May 1990-May 2005)

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**POST-SCRIPT REGARDING  
SHAAREI SHOMAYIM WINDOWS**

*by Judy Kasman*

In the last issue of *Shem Tov*, I had written about the demolition of the building on St. Clair Avenue West that was the previous home of the Shaarei Shomayim Congregation, and I had mentioned the stained glass windows of that building. I did not realize that the windows in the demolished St. Clair building were not the shul's acclaimed windows.

I subsequently learned, via an article by Jesse Mirsky in the September 15, 2012 *National Post* that nine Jewish-themed stained glass windows of that building were discovered in the basement of the present-day building. They colourfully depict, among other things, the Pilgrimage Festivals and Shabbat. Mirsky writes: "One of the windows, designed by the congregation's own Rabbi Judah Washer, was directly inspired by the proclamation of the State of Israel, and it was believed to be the first of its kind in the world."

At the time of the writing of the *National Post* article, these special windows which had faced St. Clair Avenue had been restored; four were on display in Shaarei Shomayim's Sisterhood Hall.

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**From Nu? What's New?  
The E-zine of Jewish Genealogy  
From Avotaynu  
Gary Mokotoff, Editor**

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**Volume 13, Number 44 | November 11, 2012  
ITS Releases 224,000 Correspondence Files to Partner Organizations**

The [International Tracing Service](#) (ITS) has provided additional digital copies of its records to seven partner organizations in Belgium, France, Great Britain, Israel, Luxembourg, Poland and the United States. This data involves 224,000 correspondence files with survivors and family members of victims of Nazi persecution. ITS estimates they have 3 million correspondence files of which 300,000 have been scanned. These are the so-called T/D (Tracing Document) files.

Involving about 60 million sheets of paper, the scanning of the correspondence files is the most extensive stage of the digitization project. People turned to the Tracing Service to search for family members, to gain information on the existing documents or to request documentation for compensation and pension applications. "Their letters combined with the information from the original documents enable a reconstruction of individual fates and offer information about the compensation policy of the Federal Republic of Germany," said an ITS spokesperson. By agreement among the 11 countries that govern ITS, correspondence if less than 25 years ago is not available for privacy reasons.

Recipients of the data include Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC, the Institute of National Remembrance in Warsaw, the Luxembourg Documentation and Research Centre on the Resistance, the Belgium and French state archives, as well as the Wiener Library in London. The documents may also be researched at ITS which is located in Bad Arolsen, Germany.

The International Tracing Service serves victims of Nazi persecution and their families by documenting their fate through the archives it manages. The archive stores approximately 30 million documents on persecution, forced labor and emigration. ITS preserves these historic records and has made them available for research since November 2007. In May 2008, a group of 40 genealogists, led by Avotaynu co-owners Sallyann Amdur Sack-Pikus and Gary Mokotoff, became the first group to travel to Bad Arolsen to use the ITS archives.

*Reprinted with permission from Gary Mokotoff.*

**Post to our blog:  
[www.jgstoronto.blogspot.com](http://www.jgstoronto.blogspot.com)**

## Standing Room Only for JGS Toronto's Holocaust Education Week Event

by Karen Lasky

Audiences never tire of Peter Jassem's fascinating story of discovering his Jewish roots when he was already a father. Peter spoke on November 6<sup>th</sup> at Beth Torah Congregation as part of the annual Holocaust Education Week in Toronto; JGS Toronto and the Chenstochover Aid Society were the co-sponsors of this event.

Peter Jassem, a Polish-born architect, came to live in Toronto with his family 24 years ago, when he was 36 years old. Peter's interest in Polish-Jewish heritage started with him learning quite by accident about 17 years ago that his father's family was Jewish (a fact that everyone but him seemed to know); this discovery continues to dominate his life. As Peter explained, "It's in to be a Jew in Poland", in stark contrast to those years leading up to the Holocaust and beyond. As a result of the trauma and upheaval caused by the Holocaust, combined with the uncertainty of what the post-war situation in Poland might bring, many survivors decided to hide their Jewish identity, to abandon their traditions and, often, to change their names, to intermarry, and to raise their children as gentiles. Years later, coinciding with the fall of Communism and its censorship, and in the time of the new openness in Polish-Jewish topics in Polish society, survivors' children have suddenly discovered their Jewish roots and, as a result, their lives often take unexpected turns. Peter, one such survivor's child, explored and shared his own experience with a captive audience, providing images from his Polish-Catholic youth. He is not alone, and he shared with the attendees many other stories of Poles that are discovering their Jewish identities today and finding other such people to share their new-found heritage with. The numbers are continuing to grow beyond anyone's expectations. In his talk, Peter often referenced Barbara Kessell's book, *Suddenly Jewish*, which profiles many notables who found themselves later in life to have Jewish background.

Peter is an active member of our Society and a contributing author to our recent publication, *Tracing our Roots, Telling our Stories*, a compilation of 44 personal stories by our Society's members, including many Holocaust stories, told so that their families' pasts can be shared with future generations.

Our Society's President, Harvey Glasner, in introducing Peter, spoke about the importance of recording history and preserving memory, especially those stories lost through the Holocaust.

Ephraim Fiksel, President of the Chenstochover Aid Society, concluded the evening by thanking Beth Torah Congregation and JGS Toronto.

**WISHING ALL OF OUR  
JGS TORONTO MEMBERS  
AND THEIR FAMILIES  
A JOYOUS CHANUKAH!**



This photo shows Peter as a young man: it reveals his combined interests of architecture and Judaism as he is shown beside his painting of a shul in Lesko, Poland with an actual photograph of that shul beneath it.

Peter chaired programming of the International Conference on Jewish Genealogical Societies in Toronto in 2002. He is on the board of Jewish Record Indexing – Poland, an organization that has created the world's largest searchable online database of over 4 million Jewish records from Poland. Since 2002, Peter has served as a chair of the Polish-Jewish Heritage Foundation of Canada in Toronto, and he is the Canadian representative of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw which will open in 2014. Peter writes and speaks on Polish-Jewish heritage and promotes dialogue between Poles and Jews of Poland in Canada.

### The Moment Magazine Great DNA Experiment

by Judy Kasman

The September/October 2012 issue of *Moment* magazine, an American Jewish publication, featured what genealogists, and maybe others, would consider to be an interesting article by Nadine Epstein called *The Moment Magazine Great DNA Experiment*.

The premise stemmed from the *Finding Your Roots* TV show with Prof. Henry Louis Gates Jr. that recently appeared on PBS. Fifteen well-known Jewish Americans, including Joshua Bell, Mayim Bialik, Alan Dershowitz, Tovah Feldshuh and Ms. Epstein herself, submitted DNA samples and related their family stories.

The article's conclusion: "For the most part we found zero degrees of separation. This means most of the individuals tested were directly related to one another."

To read the full fascinating story (including the haplogroup findings of those tested), go to <http://oldsite.momentmag.net/moment/issues/2012/10/GreatDNAExperiment.html>

## Genie Milgrom Wins Florida State Genealogical Society's Genealogy Outstanding Achievement Award

In the September 2011 issue of *Shem Tov*, there was a captivating article by Genie Milgrom of Florida who wrote about her life journey and her discovery of her *converso* roots in Spain. (To find this article, *My Fifteen Grandmothers*, go to [www.jgstoronto.ca](http://www.jgstoronto.ca); click on Newsletters, then click on Back Issues; you can find it by date, title or author.)

Jan Meisels Allen, Vice President of the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies (IAJGS), writes the following:

Please join me in congratulating, Genie Milgrom, president, JGS of Greater Miami, on being awarded the Florida State Genealogical Society's Genealogy Outstanding Achievement Award! Genie's research involved the evidence of the Medieval Notary Records that helped her trace an unbroken maternal lineage as proof of Jewish roots found through Catholic records. Genie has been able to trace back 15 grandmothers to her ancestral roots to Feroselle, Spain. Her research took her genealogical journey from Jewish (pre Inquisition) to Crypto Jewish to Catholic back to Jewish. Genie's recently published book, *My 15 Grandmothers* tells her story--the Florida State Genealogy Award is not for the book, but for her extensive research which led to her writing the book.

Genie just returned from a trip to Feroselle, Spain where the town's mayor proclaimed to be making an Official Act and handed her the Symbolic Key to the Jewish Quarter of The Village along with a Pergamino to serve as a Document of Historical Memory being given to a descendent of the Jews that had lived in this town of Feroselle. In history this is only the second time that a Mayor in Spain has given a Symbolic Key to a descendent of the Spanish Jews.

The Florida State Genealogical Society's Genealogy Outstanding Award in Genealogy is given to an individual, society, or institution to recognize contributions toward the promotion of genealogical interests or activities within the state of Florida. This could include a publication; a sustained work in the area of extracting, preserving, accumulating or collecting genealogical/historical data (regardless of what state in which the data originated or to what state they apply) for the genealogical community; an instructor of genealogy or local history; or any person who has aided in furthering the interests of research in genealogy over a period of five (5) or more years. To read more about the award and award recipients go to: <http://flsgs.org/cpage.php?pt=12>. The award was given on November 9...

Michael Milgrom, Genie's husband, nominated her for the award.

IAJGS is proud of the accomplishment that Genie has done as an example of the excellence that a Jewish genealogist achieved. It is an example for all of us to strive to attain. IAJGS and its member societies are indeed fortunate to have leaders of such caliber.

Please join me in congratulating Genie Milgrom!

## Three Programmes Combining Music and Genealogy

On November 28<sup>th</sup>, we were privileged to have a presentation by Eric Stein, Artistic Director of Ashkenaz Festival, on the subject of the Ger Mandolin Orchestra. A sizeable audience was captivated by Eric's description of the history of the mandolin in the context of its use in Europe and, by extension, by European immigrants to North America. He recounted how the current Orchestra's founder, Avner Yonai (an Israeli San Francisco businessman), was motivated to re-create the mandolin orchestra in which his ancestors had played in Ger (Gora Kalwaria), Poland some 80 years ago. We heard about how the orchestra was formed, and its accomplishments in playing in San Francisco, in Israel and in Poland, especially in synagogues.

Eric is one of the members of this 11-man ensemble (playing the mandobass, the largest and therefore deepest of the mandolins). His talk was highlighted by many remarkable photos of then and now, and by audio and video clips.



Ger Mandolin Orchestra, then and now

On December 12<sup>th</sup>, we continue in a musical way when singer and choir conductor, Varda Hall Berenstein, presents *Growing up as a Jew in Switzerland, 1921-1949*. Now 91 years old Varda, who was born in Basel to Russian parents, will talk about her life during the WWII years and performing to children in refugee camps, among many other personal experiences. Varda has performed, taught and conducted for various schools and organizations in many locales across Canada since emigrating to Toronto in 1949.

Then, on January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2013, Cantor Ron Graner, a JGS Toronto member, will share with us the subject of one of his passions when he presents *Searching for David Nowakowsky, Music of a Forgotten Master*. Nowakowsky was a Russian musician (1848-1921) about whom Graner states: "David Nowakowsky and his music have almost been wiped off the face of the earth. Even his tombstone has been destroyed! 3,500 manuscripts were smuggled out of Russia to his Granddaughter Sofie, a concert-pianist in Germany after the Bolsheviks seized Odessa's Brody Synagogue in 1922. In 1937 Sofie and her family became stateless refugees, fleeing the Nazis. The music was hidden on a farm in occupied France while the family escaped to Switzerland. Only now is the music being published and performed. "Graner will tell the story of the discovery of this music and his artistic efforts to keep it alive".

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## SITE-SEEING

### A Compendium of Useful Websites for Genealogists

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Retired Toronto school librarian Alan Brown has created two websites, one for documenting each historical plaque in Toronto and the other for Ontario's plaques. The sites not only display a photograph for each plaque but also offer a description of the significance of each plaque. You can search on the sites for any plaque by name. Plaques of interest to our Society members include those at Christie Pits, the Kiever Shul and the YM & YWHA at Bloor & Spadina (now the MNJCC). Mr. Brown has been pursuing this hobby for 8 years. He welcomes submissions from the public.

[www.torontoplaques.com](http://www.torontoplaques.com)      [www.ontarioplaques.com](http://www.ontarioplaques.com)



At the Yad Vashem Photo Archive, there is a collection of Lodz Ghetto coloured photographs taken by Walter Genewein.

"In 1987 someone rummaging in a second hand bookstore in Vienna came across a set of about 400 color slides. Upon examination, they turned out to be images of the Lodz ghetto, taken by Walter Genewein, the Nazis' chief accountant. After Genewein died, his companion sold the pictures to the bookstore in Vienna. From there, they made their way into the collection of the Jewish Museum in Frankfurt, and also into Jablonski's movie "Photographer". Genewein must have had his reasons for selecting one view over another and for carefully numbering the images, as if to create a sequence." *From website*

<http://collections.yadvashem.org/photosarchive/en-us/6464349-container.html>



The following information comes from Jan Meisels Allen, IAJGS Vice President and Chairperson, IAJGS Public Records Access Monitoring Committee:

The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Cyprus Collection (1945-1949) is available online for the first time. The collection includes 16,667 pages of textual files including personal letters, group petitions and newspapers published by the deportees.

From 1946 until the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, the British confined some 53,000 Holocaust survivors on the island of Cyprus. From August 1946 to February 1949, the deportees lived behind barbed wire in 12 camps on Cyprus. During this period, 53,000 Jews passed through the camps, 2,200 children were born in the camps, and 150 Jews died there --nearly all of the deportees were survivors of the Nazi death camps. The [collection](#) also has 180 photographs taken at the detention camps.

<http://archives.jdc.org/archives-search/?s=archivestopnav>



The Central Zionist Archives in Jerusalem has released its new website.

As it states: "The Central Zionist Archives in Jerusalem holds millions of documents and pictures that tell innumerable stories about individuals, and the joint story of a people, since the dream of a "Jewish state" was woven, via the settlement enterprise, the absorption of immigrants, the strengthening of the Jewish settlement in Palestine in preparation for the establishment of a future state and until the first years of the State of Israel." Look for the section called "Family Research".

<http://www.zionistarchives.org.il/en/about-us/Pages/Default.aspx>

### Hello, Columbus: A Jewish Perspective

*by Judy Kasman*

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Almost everyone can tell you the year when Christopher Columbus (Cristobal Colon) sailed to America, but not many people would tell you that Columbus was Jewish and that he was a *Marrano* (swine), a victim of the Spanish Inquisition, who inwardly was Jewish but appeared Catholic to the outsider.

Charles Garcia is a Florida businessman who was born in Panama. Earlier this year, at the time of the 508<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Christopher Columbus, Garcia wrote an interesting article entitled "Was Columbus secretly a Jew?"; this article appeared online at [www.esefarad.com](http://www.esefarad.com).

Garcia claims that Columbus' "...quest [was] to liberate Jerusalem from the Muslims. During Columbus' lifetime, Jews became the target of fanatical religious persecution. On March 31, 1942, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella proclaimed that all Jews were to be expelled from Spain. The edict especially targeted the 800,000 Jews who had never converted, and gave them four months to pack up and get out."

Among the many facts in Garcia's article was that in Columbus' Will, he left money for the poor, some specifically for "...a Jew who lived at the entrance of the Lisbon Jewish Quarter." Garcia states that the signature used by Columbus was like inscriptions found on Jewish headstones in Spain. Also, apparently, Columbus did not sail on the date initially intended since that date was Tisha B'Av, and he would not set out on the same date as that of the destruction of the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem. As it turns out, he did set sail on the date that Jews were to leave Spain.

Garcia writes that Columbus was funded by two Jewish Conversos, Louis de Santangel and Gabriel Sanchez, as well as by rabbi & statesman Don Isaac Abrabanel and not by the Spanish King and Queen.

## 33rd IAJGS International Conference on Jewish Genealogy

August 4-9, 2013  
at the Boston Park Plaza Hotel

co-hosted by the  
**International Association of  
Jewish Genealogical Societies (IAJGS)**  
and the  
**Jewish Genealogical Society of  
Greater Boston (JGSGB)**

[http://iajgs.org/2013\\_Boston/2013.html](http://iajgs.org/2013_Boston/2013.html)



## Fiesta de las Kandelikas

by Judy Kasman



In her article at [www.esefarad.com](http://www.esefarad.com), “A Sephardic Hanukkah From the Jews of the Island of Rhodes”, author Stella Cohen writes: “The Judeo-Spanish Jews who settled in Rhodes Island and Turkey from Spain after the 1492 edict of expulsion took on the custom of celebrating Hanukkah – *Las Kandelikas*. In their adopted Ottoman homeland they commemorated the victory of the Maccabees over the Syrian-Greeks and the rededication of the temple in Jerusalem. According to legend it is said that there was only enough pure olive oil to keep a *Menorah* burning for one day. Miraculously the flame was kept alight for eight days. This was traditionally re-enacted by kindling a *Menorah* over the eight days. In Rhodes eight small glasses with a little water and a thick layer of oil on which wicks were floated and lit was used instead of a *Menorah* – *Las Kandelikas*.”

Typical Rhodesli Hanukkah meals include food fried in oil. Also savoured are dairy foods to remember Judith, who it is alleged defeated a Greek tyrant, feeding him with cheese and wine until he fell asleep.”

*Ohco Kandelikas* (Eight Little Candles) is a Ladino song for this holiday written by singer Flory Jagoda. To see and hear fourteen (yes, fourteen!) versions of this song, go to <http://wn.com/ochokandelikas>.

## Announcing the Passing of Ruth Goldbloom, Co-Founder of Pier 21 Society

by Judy Kasman

**R**uth Goldbloom, born 88 years ago in New Waterford, NS, died this past August. She had co-founded the Pier 21 Society in Halifax in 1990; this ultimately led to Pier 21 becoming a national museum.

As an outstanding volunteer, Goldbloom received the Order of Nova Scotia in 1988. She was also appointed in 1992 as a member of the Order of Canada, and subsequently was made an Officer.

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## The Wedding Dress

by Karen Lasky

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He was a tailor from Poland, just as his Father and Grandfather before him. It was all he knew prior to his life being interrupted by the Nazis; and now, following his immigration to Canada in 1948, once again, he was a tailor.

Fast forward to 1967, and I am standing on a small podium in the tailor shop, facing the mirror in the flowing white wedding dress that had been made just for me. I catch a glimpse of myself looking somewhat bored and bothered as the tailor circles me again and again, pinning, tucking all the while, making sure it would be fitted entirely perfectly to me. After all, there was a momentous occasion on the horizon. I would be presented in marriage to my new husband, a proud and important moment for any set of parents. But for those parents that had survived the Holocaust, having lost their entire families in the process, there was nothing that held more importance. The marriage of a first-born daughter of the Holocaust symbolized the possibility of new family, or perhaps, more to the point, an opportunity to recapture the family that was lost. I, oblivious, continue to be bothered by all this fuss over the wedding dress.

The tailor died four years later. Some 45 years have since passed and I continue to wonder why I have not been able to separate myself from this wedding dress. It has continued to live in my home and has taken up a permanent place in my heart. I periodically take it out from its hiding place, stare at it, touch it over and over in pure amazement. How I could have underestimated the power of those moments on the podium and the importance it held for the tailor, my Father... If I only knew then what I know now; but my Father was unable to share the horrors of his Holocaust experience. I would have thanked him then from the deepest part of my heart. He had given me the ultimate gift, from Father to Daughter.



Karen Lasky with her father, Jacob Spivak z"l, her special tailor.

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## Ninety Years Young

by Harvey Glasner

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Henry Wellisch, a Past President of the Jewish Genealogical Society of Canada (Toronto), turned 90 years old on September 22<sup>nd</sup>.

Henry is a unique individual whom all of us in the JGS Toronto family hold in the highest regard.

Through no fault of his own, it was impossible for Henry to receive a formal academic education, mainly because of his incredible personal journey of survival through wartime Europe, Palestine, Mauritius and Israel. (You can read about it in *Tracing Our Roots, Telling Our Stories*).

However, most people who meet Henry would believe him to be a man of letters as opposed to a tradesman. Henry does not have a Ph.D. nor an M.A., but he is a self-taught, highly accomplished researcher, historian, genealogist, raconteur, and public speaker. In many respects, he is the JGS Toronto trademark -- he is our brand.

Henry was honoured at our October 24<sup>th</sup> programme. Below is a photo of the celebrant cutting his birthday cake.

