

JewishGen

PASSOVER COMPANION

תשפ"ד | 5784



MUSEUM OF
JEWISH HERITAGE
A LIVING MEMORIAL
TO THE HOLOCAUST



JewishGen
מרכז עולמי לגנאלוגיה יהודית
The Global Home for Jewish Genealogy

About JewishGen

JewishGen is the genealogical research division of New York's Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, and serves as the global home for Jewish genealogy. Featuring unparalleled access to 30+ million records, it offers unique search tools, along with opportunities for researchers to connect with others who share similar interests. Award winning resources such as the Family Finder, Discussion Groups, and ViewMate, are relied upon by thousands each day. In addition, JewishGen's extensive informational, educational and historical offerings, such as the Jewish Communities Database, Yizkor Book translations, InfoFiles, Family Tree of the Jewish People, and KehilaLinks, provide critical insights, first-hand accounts, and context about Jewish communal and familial life throughout the world. Offered as a free resource, JewishGen.org has facilitated thousands of family connections and success stories, and is currently engaged in an intensive expansion effort that will bring many more records, tools, and resources to its collections. In addition, JewishGen offers study/volunteer immersive travel experiences to Poland in order to help inspire the next generation of Jewish genealogical leadership.

For more information, and to get started with your research, please visit www.JewishGen.org.



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Design: Jen Klor, Jerusalem | jenklor.com



Matzoh cover, Russia. Gift of Israel and Edith Milner, Dresher, Pennsylvania, 2013.12.1.

Navy blue embroidered matzoh cover with Hebrew: next year in Jerusalem. Velvet top, three pieces of navy fabric with a repetitive embroidered floral design stitched together on three sides, leaving the bottom open in order to receive the three pieces of matzoh used at the Seder. Tabs in the center of each layer with the words, in

Hebrew, for Priest, Levite and Israel, the designations for this matzoh, embroidered in green thread. Elaborate decoration. Order of the seder around perimeter, four words on each side, in fuchsia, orange, pink and green. The central decoration is framed by one line of orange embroidery. At each corner, moving outward, between the lines of the Seder, is a geometric decoration, a triangle sitting on the point of the square. The tip of the triangle supports another triangle by only its tip. This triangle supports a rectangle divided into two colors. In the center of the cover are the words, in Hebrew, “next year in Jerusalem, each word on its own line. First word: orange, second: pink, the third word is split: first three letters in fuchsia, the last four in orange. Below this is the year 1902, which is split by a K. All around the words are stylized floral elements which form a symmetrical design leaving the words framed by a circular shape, within the square border. on the back of the matzoh cover, embroidered in green are the Cyrillic letters corresponding to P.Z.

Annie Milner née Eisen is the mother of Israel Milner, the lender. She was born in 1893 in Trachenbrod (Zofyuvka, Ukraine). She emigrated at the age of 15. The lenders found the matzoh cover in her things after her death in 1976. They have relatives named Zipper and think that the Z on the back is the initial of some relative P. Zipper.

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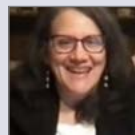
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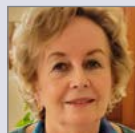
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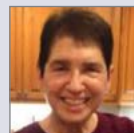
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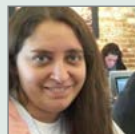
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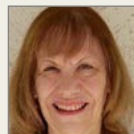


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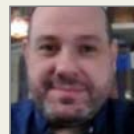
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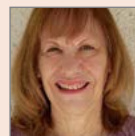
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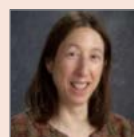
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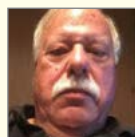


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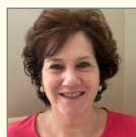
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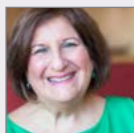


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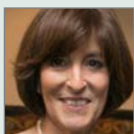


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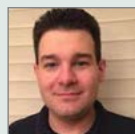
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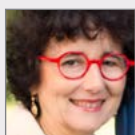


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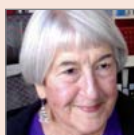


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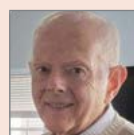


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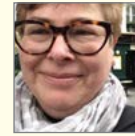
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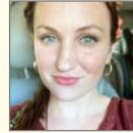
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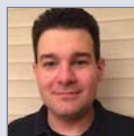


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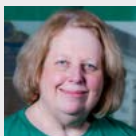


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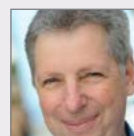
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JewishGen

WE STAND WITH ISRAEL



The JewishGen Passover Companion 2024/5784 is dedicated to the memory of our brothers and sisters in Israel who lost their lives on October 7th, and with fervent hopes and prayers for the safety of the Israeli Armed Forces, and the safe return of those still held hostage.

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INTRODUCTION

PASSOVER HOLIDAY COMPANION 2024/5784

Dear JewishGen Community,

On April 8th, millions of people throughout North America looked up to the skies in amazement at the last solar eclipse which will take place for many years. Fortuitously, the Torah reading which preceded this event included a chapter about the commandment to inaugurate the “new moon” each month, thus setting the basis for the Jewish calendar which follows the lunar cycle.

The symbolism behind this ceremony is a lesson in the cyclical nature of the Jewish experience throughout time, and an expression of hope for the future. Each month, the moon waxes and wanes, and therefore there is a certain period of darkness which envelopes the world. Yet, the moon returns once again at the beginning of the next month – representing a new light, and spirit of encouragement, renewal, peace and serenity for the world.

The past 6 months have been marked by much darkness for world Jewry. Our brothers and sisters in Israel are still reeling from the events of October 7th and engaged in a war which has exacted a heavy price. Thousands have been injured and killed, and the hostages have not been returned. On college campuses, and in communities throughout the world, the surge of antisemitic acts have left Jewish communities unsettled.

But we remain confident that the new moon will shine again, and that the current state of darkness will turn to light. And our Museum is doing everything possible to accomplish this goal.

As an institution devoted to preserving our communal history and heritage, while standing at the forefront against antisemitism, we are proud that the NYC Board of Education has mandated inclusion of our Holocaust curriculum throughout their system. Thousands of students, mostly from public schools, are visiting our Museum, exploring our exhibitions, and learning what steps they can take to ensure we live in a more tolerant world. At the same time, particularly because of October 7th, we published a guide developed for educators to help them understand historical and contemporary antisemitism, and to better equip them with information and knowledge when answering questions.

While all of this happens, the Jewish people still need to look forward, and the Seder offers a tremendous opportunity for families to come together, strengthen each other, and talk about how the Jewish people have endured and thrived throughout the various trials and tribulations which have befallen us throughout time.

As such, we are pleased to share our “JewishGen Passover Companion,” which is a collection of historical and inspirational vignettes about Passover that are found in the memorial books translated and available on JewishGen. It includes stories of inspiration and hope, and provides a window into how our ancestors not only approached life, but also the future. We hope that you will utilize this Passover Companion at your Seder. We have heard that some families have read entire passages during the Seder at appropriate thematic points. No matter how you use it, we hope the Companion will inspire a deeper appreciation for what it means to be part of the Jewish people.

Special thank you to Bruce Drake for organizing the introductions and identifying the chapters to focus on this year, (and publishing the “Weekly Yizkor Book Spotlight” throughout the year), and to Gayle Justman for her proofreading (along with her many hats at JewishGen, serving as social media coordinator, publicity specialist for JewishGen Press, a Yizkor Book project coordinator, and Mozyr District coordinator for the Belarus RD). In addition, we express our sincere appreciation to Lance Ackerfeld for coordinating the Yizkor Book Translation project, and to Joel Alpert for coordinating the JewishGen Press.

Wishing everyone a Happy Passover, with thoughts and prayers for our brothers and sisters in Israel.

Jack Kliger
President & CEO
Museum of Jewish Heritage –
A Living Memorial to the Holocaust

Avraham Groll
Vice President of JewishGen



THE SPLENDID PASSOVER

Rachov-Annopol (ראחוב-אנופול), Poland

Rachov-Annopol sits on the Vistula River in southeastern Poland, about 40 miles from Lublin. Jews began settling there in the 1600s. For hundreds of years, about 80% of its inhabitants were Jews. They were often turbulent years because the town had been shaped by its strategic location, conflicts between neighboring powers, and changes in political boundaries. Even before the horror of the Holocaust, events in each century brought great suffering to its Jews. This was particularly true during World War I when the front battle lines ran along the Vistula.

But Passover offered a “splendid” respite from the worries of the world as the title of this chapter suggests. Winter gave way to spring and the family joined together to make the house ready for the holiday: taking the dishes to the river to wash them, airing out the house and scouring everything inside, and getting rid of any crumb of *hametz*.

At the center of this was the Seder. The children kept their eyes on the father, as he leaned back and recited the story of servitude and redemption. And the meal: “Can anyone forget the Seder of those days ... Mama’s fish and meat, the soup and matzah balls, the hardboiled eggs in the salt water” and the sweet melody of the father singing the Kiddush.

The following account was written by Hayim Nisenboim and translated by Israel I. Taslitt.



“Beth Jacob” School, 1926

Today is the day before Passover Eve. I recall the days of my youth, when I was attending heder. My teacher, Rebbe Boruch Yoel, of blessed memory (I still see him, with his white beard and high forehead, eyes glistening as he looked at us) would say: “Children, tonight we search for the *hametz*. Search well and let not a crumb remain in your homes.” With this, we jumped up and ran out of the room, scattering to our homes, with happy sounds filling the air. The sun is bright overhead, and the thawing earth is steaming, waking up, sprouting green on the ground and in the branches. The Wisla and the pond have shaken off the ice, which had bound them all winter, and the free-flowing waters rush down the river and overflow its banks.

Our job is to take new dishes down to the

Wisla and immerse them for the festival. The fresh spring air fills our lungs. We too are in the spring of our lives.

Mother calls out: “Children, help me bring the Passover into the house.” My sister and I take down the double windows, the colorful streamers and the cotton wadding used to insulate them during the cold winter. We wash the dusty panes. The sun bursts through into the humble house, resting on the table, the bookcase, the pictures on the walls. Across the room hangs the wicker basket, full of *matzot*; next to it is the mortar, to grind *matzot* into fine matzeh meal. The sun comes to rests on the bottle of homemade wine, which my father had pressed out of raisins for the Four Cups. My sisters are rubbing the tiles and the wooden



Group of Camp Survivors at a rest home in France, 1946

table in the kitchen. The tableware is cleansed in boiling water, into which a red-hot stone had been immersed. The entire house becomes a magic abode: the copper pans glisten like gold, the special Passover tableware, the colorful glasses – everything spic-and-span for the Seder.

Mother works hard, cleansing the stove.

At nightfall, as soon as Father returns from the synagogue, we proceed to search for the *hametz*. I look at my father's fine face, his high forehead (not a wrinkle on it; perhaps because he looks younger). Mother hands him the wooden spoon and a large goose feather. Father paces through each room, pronounces the benediction, sweeps up the crumbs which mother has made ready there, then wraps everything carefully in a towel and places the bundle in a corner. This done, he

makes his way leisurely to the home of the rabbi, to sell the *hametz*.

On the next morning, we take the bundle and rush to the courtyard of the public bathhouse. A huge bonfire is already burning. We take the bundle – spoon, feather and crumbs – and throw it into the flame.

Can anyone forget the Seder of those days? Mama's fish and meat, the soup and matzah balls, the hardboiled eggs in the salt water? I can still hear the sweet melody of my father's *Kiddush*. We begin reciting the Haggada loudly, and I ask the Four Questions.

We, the children, keep our eyes on Father, as he leans back and recites the story of servitude and redemption. Tonight Father, like the Passover night itself, is different. He is "king," benevolent and kindly, singing the Seder melodies so sweetly that they penetrate into the depth of your soul. He makes believe that he doesn't see us pilfering the afikoman. He fills the cup of Elijah and sends my sister to open the door for the Prophet. Will Elijah really drink from our cup? I wonder. How can he drink from his cup at all the sederim in the world? Maybe he merely touches the cup to his lips. Say, his cup does look a bit less full!

How can one forget those unforgettable days, the festive expression of holiness itself? Such were the Rachov kozes...

To learn more about **Rachov-Annopol**, please visit:

<https://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/annopol/annopol.html>



A PESACH SEDER IN VAIHINGEN AND THE REVENGE ON A KAPO

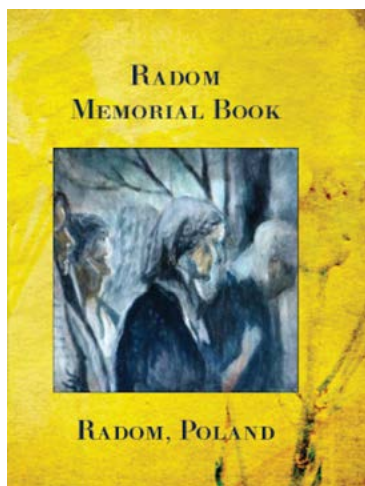
Radom (ראדעם), Poland

Radom is in east central Poland, 62 miles south of Lublin. The first records of Jews in Radom are from the year 1568, after which a chain of Jewish tribulations, decrees, persecutions, and expulsions began. Despite it all, the Jewish people thrived. The struggle for rights of residency in the settlement succeeded, and it became an important Jewish city. Radom was a dynamic Jewish city of industry and commerce, Torah and Hassidism, love of Zion and ideals of freedom; a city with fine wealthy philanthropists and honorable workers; intelligentsia and folksy, simple and sincere Jews.

Before World War II, Radom had a substantial Jewish population, accounting for 24,745 of its 81,113 people in 1938. The Germans occupied the city in 1939 and soon after herded its Jews into two ghettos. In the winter of 1944-1945, some of the Jews ended up in Vaihingen Concentration Camp in Germany as slave laborers, imported by the Nazis to help bring their armaments manufacturing underground due to intense Allied bombing.

That is the setting for this Passover story from Radom's Yizkor book. A group of Jews in the camp were determined to maintain their identity by honoring the traditions of the holiday. That meant finding flour and figuring out the means to bake matzah. Their leader hit upon an ingenious plan to make it happen and twenty Jews who lived in the camp managed to pull off a Seder, where aside from the matzah they ate potatoes and drank homemade wine which consisted of water and sugar. They even managed to read the Haggadah.

The following account was written by Moshe Perl and translated by Anita Frishman Gabbay.



Cover of the Yizkor Book available for purchase via JewishGen Press

It was still a difficult year in the Vaihingen concentration camp (1944-1945).

On one side, the heavy stone-mining in “Shtolboi,” the unbearable night-shifts, cold and hunger. And on the other side, the typhus epidemic and other strange illnesses which caused the death of thousands: the fallen [dead] at the hands of cruel torture invented by the SS-sadists and by the bullets from their rifles – all of this led to the creation of “mental” indifference.

Nevertheless, even under these circumstances, there were some who displayed stubbornness in this “madness” in order to maintain a Jewish identity.

Pesach (Passover) was approaching. How could we avoid eating *hametz*? [forbidden food during Passover]

My brother Meir’s words lingered in my head, in the earlier years we still had means, even in the small ghetto [Radom], where we baked matzah

in the ovens of the armament factory. But in Vaihingen? In such a hell-hole?

The question tormented me more than the threat of death, which hounded us every minute and at every step.

People got accustomed to this and stared into the face of death daily. But we weren’t prepared to eat *hametz* during Pesach.

Where do we find flour and potatoes and how can we bake our matzahs!?...

And this is what happened.

Several days before Pesach someone arrived in my workshop where I worked as a sign-painter, one of the SS camp leaders. We called him “Gabela.” He was a small-statured German, somewhat of a less-energetic torturer than the others. And his motto was, “eat and go to work,” a routine among the internees. This “Gabela” came to ask me: can you make me a shooting range to learn to shoot? These signs [scraps] which are damaged by bullet holes exist should be repairable.

At that moment an idea came to mind and I requested a large clean-up. I would put the garbage into large paper sacks (which were in the workshops) and I would paste white paper on the sacks with a drawn soldier in a helmet. With this plan, I told him, we would need a lot of flour to make a cluster.

My proposal appealed to the German and he immediately gave me a paper (requisition) for the provision-shop for 5 kilos of flour.

Seeing this as a sign for our salvation, I went immediately to the boss of the camp-kitchen,

a Czech Volksdeutch, by the name of Pil, who looked like an elephant. By trade he was a painter. Hearing about the 5 kilos of flour, he became very interested in my workshop and about my trade. He assured me that I would receive my flour, but he told me he had his suspicions: would the flour be going toward producing matzah for Pesach?

He still remembered from his Jewish neighbours the taste of matzah...

At first I was frightened but then I asked Pil for an additional 5 kilos, which was actually to bake the matzah.

To my great surprise, Pil showed his sincerity and gave me 10 kilos of flour, on the condition not to take the entire load in one shot. If they [the Germans] caught me, I could show the original paper that I received for the flour.

In the end, he told me that those that didn't want to eat food from the kitchen, could roast their own potatoes which he would provide.

I couldn't believe this, what my ears just heard.

His gentle words, it seems, were a result of the "front" closing in, which was taking place on German soil, and perhaps not too far from the camp. (At night we heard explosions in our region as the Allied airplanes cut through the German zone. This left us with renewed hope in the hearts of our downtrodden people.)

The German gave me a receipt for the supervisor of the store, to give me 10 kilos of flour. Arriving there, I began to negotiate with him for additional flour, as we needed the matzah for the entire Pesach. At first he yelled at me that he would not endanger himself for those

fanatics. But afterwards, I preached to him some humanity and showed him the devotion of some Jews, his Radomer brothers, who didn't want to eat *hametz* during Pesach. He softened and gave me the additional 5 kilos of flour. We now had, more or less, 15 kilos of flour.

He gave me the flour from a newly-opened sack, to make it as "kosher a possible".

Bringing the flour to my workshop, with my brother Meir, I assembled our "friends" in the evening and showed them the great miracle.

Their joy was beyond description.

The extinguished souls were ignited again. We undertook our work, and together we organized pieces of wood. A carpenter from Radom provided the wood. I found a wheel in my workshop and the Holy task began.

With a piece of broken glass from a bottle we prepared to clean the table surface. We placed the prepared dough on the table and in the small workshop oven, I placed bricks and in this way we baked our matzah.

In this secret work, with locked doors and windows covered with *shmates*, these people participated: Sholem Chervonokmien, Yacov Leventhal, Gabriel Bergman, Hershel London, my brother Meir and others.

The wall of my workshop bordered the wall of the camp-leader, Yechiel Friedman's room.

The wall became overheated from the nonstop use of the oven, Friedman knocked on our door and asked to open quickly, to see what was going on. With hesitation we opened. As soon as he saw the oven, he stood speechless.



Cover of the Original Yizkor Book (published in Yiddish and English)

With surprise he asked us to slow down the firing because the sparks were coming through the chimney, and he didn't want to raise suspicion. The guards would shoot us.

Departing, he asked us to remember him and leave a matzah for his first seder. We noticed tears in his eyes, and our fear of him dissipated.

We hid the baked matzahs under the roof.

But the news of the matzah spread like fire among the Jews in the camp (there were also

non-Jews in the camp, from 16 nations of Europe) and a renewed hope beat in their hearts: such a small event like baking matzah under such difficult circumstances in the Vahingen concentration camp, Jews still had the courage to believe in their Judaism to bake matzah.

At the first seder evening, the aforementioned, as well as Hamia'la Milstein, Leibel Krel from Warsaw, Leibel Richtman, Ezriel Warchivker, and Motele Gritzer assembled in my workshop, and in great fear, like the Anusim of Spain years ago, we sat around two large tables with reverence and led our Seder.

"We were slaves!"

Each one at the seder received 3 matzahs. Instead of wine, we served sweetened water. Instead of *maror*, white beets. As *karpas*, potatoes. Salt and water we had plenty...

We said the Haggadah from a siddur which we managed to hide the entire time. After the first half of the Haggadah, Ezriel Warchivker went into ecstasy and led an entire sermon, not to fall into despair, keep our faith, endure the injustice because our redemption is near.

We were later informed that other Jews stood outside on guard. The night truly was a blessing.

To learn more about **Radom**, please visit:

<https://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/radom/Radom.html>



PASSOVER

(from a chapter titled “Old Images”)

Kurenets (קורניץ), Belarus

The coming of spring is a frequent motif signifying joy in Yizkor book memories of Passover. During the first days of the holiday, “the air was usually still cool, but the sun was shining and the street glowed in a golden light,” remembers the author of this chapter from the book of Kurenets in Belarus, about 67 miles north of Minsk. “The frost was gone from the windows, birds fly in the blue skies and everyone was dressed in holiday clothes, visiting each other, with their hearts full of hope.”

This chapter brims with colorful touches: the painting of the house for the holiday with the help of a Christian couple who first needed to be fortified with a bottle of wine (“Without a glass of wine our hands are paralyzed,” they would say); the Seder where the father sat at the head of the table, reclining on pillows, presiding over the dinner and its rituals; and stories of the characters in town such as the Jew who, after returning from synagogue, couldn’t wait for the Seder and started drinking glass after glass of wine. He saw no need to read from the Haggadah. “What is there to read? We all know that the Pharaoh was son-of-a-gun.”

Wonderfully captured is the last scramble to get ready as the holiday arrives. Everyone is up early and in a hurry with tasks all day until the time comes to sit down at the Seder table in a house where everything is shiny and clean and the wine in the glasses seem to be winking in the light.

The following account was written by Yaakov Alpert and translated by Eilat Gordin Levitan.



Natives of Kurenets meet in Tel Aviv after the war

What energy the women of the town put into preparing for Passover! The poorest of them painted their homes by themselves and came to our house to take the paint. The wealthier homes would hire painters, but this was not done hastily and simply.

In our home, the painters were Stach and Yachmina, a Christian couple. They were average in height, with red noses and watery eyes from being perpetual drunks. They had a run-down house behind the bath-house near the big swamps. They were the town's *goyim shel Shabbat*. When they would come to work, the first thing we had to put for them was a bottle of wine and salty fish.

"Hadah," they would say, "without a glass of wine our hands are paralyzed."

After breakfast, they would mix the paint and start to paint the wall. To enter the room was a very scary proposition. If someone dared, he would come out of there covered by paint. They were not painting, they were spraying.

"Stach," my mother would ask with a warm smile, "I ask you please to paint the walls, not the floor and windows." When Stach would hear mother's request, he would start laughing and answer, "Ha ha ha. Don't be worried Hadetzkah. We will make your house so so beautiful! And when your holy God will enter your house he will be so pleased that he will bless you and you bear another son!"

(Stach knew a lot of the Jewish customs and knew that on Passover we opened the door, so as he could understand it we were opening it for God who was making a journey from house to house.)

The house would look like a battle zone. Tables and chairs would be moved. However, ultimately they would arrange things and then everything, all the tools and dishes would be washed. The matzahs in the guest room would be covered with white sheets, and I would hold a lit candle and father would hold a wooden spoon and a goose-feather. We would go window by window and *Abbah* would clear every gram of *hametz* and would say, "*Kol chamira vachamia dika virshuti*."

On the morning of the evening of Passover, we would get up very early. Since my father was his parents' oldest boy, every year he would do the *siyum* of the *masechta*. We would hurry to pray with the first *minyan*.

After the first prayer, we would drink *Le Chaim* in the synagogue and return home. When we would return, we would find that the last rooms were already prepared for Passover, and *Emmah* would not let any of us enter.

At 10 am we would eat the last *hametz* meal. Father would take the wooden spoon that was covered and tied and would burn the *hametz* in a little oven and would say, "*Asher kidshanu bemitzvotav, vitzeevanu al beuor hametz*."

All the town's furnaces would be burning. According to the rules, the furnaces must be so hot that the rocks would glow red like fire and throw sparks. From every chimney, you could see smoke coming to the clear spring skies. The fear of fire was large, particularly in Smorgon Street, where there lived a thrifty misery Jew who never cleaned his chimney. The smoke that came from his chimney was somewhere between black and red.

We are all in a hurry that day. We cleared the last dishes in the bathhouse, we took down the Passover dishes from the attic. Now, my mother gives me and my sister, Rocheleh, a new job, *Lachtosh Misot*, to fix the matzot.

This is a difficult job, but I have no choice. Most of the work I have to do. My sister, Rocheleh, who is very tricky always managed to get away. She would say, "Yonkel, my stomach is hurting me awfully," and she would run to the yard. She would return to help for two minutes, then say, "Oh, my hand is tired. You do it Yonkel, in return I'll give you some nuts. I'm mixing and mixing and I'm so tired that I can't feel my hand."

Dressed like noblemen, I in my new suit and new shoes that are a little big for me, my mother put cotton in them, Father in his black and white suit we go to the synagogue. After the Maariv prayer, my father sends me to bring Saftah Gelkah Alperovich to the seder.

Saftah Gelkah, tiny and skinny, her face full of deep lines, but her little eyes still sparkling with light, never seems to get old. I dearly loved my Saftah (grandma) Glekah. She always had a present for me. A cucumber from her garden, wild pears, and

others. When I would come to Saftah, I would find her all dressed, shining in her black dress and jacket, I would take her to our home for the seder. Father sits at the head of the table, reclining on pillows. Next to the white pillow cases and the white tablecloth, my father would appear a little pale but his eagle eyes shined and his Hertzal beard had a few white hairs was all very groomed. And mother, it's a miracle, she worked so hard, when did she find time to get dressed and look so beautiful!

Everything in the house is shiny and clean. The wine in the glasses seems to be winking in the light. Father reads *Kalah Machelannah*, I ask the four questions, and then we read the Hagadah. We eat and drink from the wine that warms the body.

There is one thing that I was never able to do: steal the afikomen. I would watch my sister with seven eyes, but she would always be first and not only that, at the end she would mock me and point at me.



A corner in the Kurenets market. The picture was taken at the end of World War I.



Jewish natives of Kurenets as partisans

The next day, Stach and Yachmeena would get rewards for the painting of the house. They would get the wine that we used for the 10 plagues and call it *Makot*. My little sister would say, “Stach, Mechnah, *makot*?” Stach would make a happy facial expression and would tell his wife, “Smatzah! Davie yashtah!”

Each home in town had a seder. Many homes couldn’t afford real wine and they would use another beverage, usually honey water. In houses that couldn’t afford Cheft fish, they would eat the Yazga fish. Nevertheless, matzah was in every home and people would say the hagadah very intently.

There was a story about one Jew in town, who came from the synagogue and saw the wine bottle on the table, couldn’t wait for the seder and started drinking glass after glass. When his wife begged him to read a little from the hagadah, her drunken husband answered, “What is there to read? We all know that the Pharoah was son-of-a-gun.”

While I’m telling that story, I must tell the story of Abremel Eibender who, came to the synagogue the day after Passover limping and on his forehead he had a big bump. Everyone was wondering. It was known that Abremel was not a wild man, he would not touch a fly. And his wife, Yonah, is a peaceful person too. So how was he so injured?

Abremel would not answer the questions but in Kurenets, you couldn’t keep a secret and eventually we found out. Since he was a very devoted Lebabovitch Chasid, he had a tradition not to only tell the exit from Egypt, but to “live” the exit from Egypt. He would put a big pail full of water in his house. On his shoulder, he would put a big bag. Moreover, like the fathers of our fathers, he would quickly jump from one side of the pail to the other as if he was crossing the sea. However, that Seder was not a lucky one for him, and his foot fell into the pail and that was how he was hurt.

The first days of Passover the air is usually still, cool, but the sun is shining and the street shines in a golden light. The frost is gone from the windows, but you still see a few drops of shining water from the edges of the roofs. Birds fly in the blue skies. Everyone is dressed in holiday clothes, visiting each other, and the heart is full of hope.

To learn more about **Kurenets**, please visit:

<https://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/kurenets/kurenets.html>



THE UNFORGETTABLE PASSOVER OF 1943 IN AUSCHWITZ-BIRKENAU

Auschwitz-Birkenau, Oświęcim, Poland

The following excerpt from the Yizkor Book of Jedwabne, Poland, was written by Rabbi Chaim Yitzchak Greengrass, and describes how Jews imprisoned at Auschwitz-Birkenau managed to conduct a Seder. While we have published this in the past, it is as timely as ever.

He writes: “The celebration of this Seder night left imprints on my soul. Now, when I perform the Passover service, I understand the meaning of the statement that each man in every generation is obliged to consider himself as if he personally was redeemed from slavery into freedom.”

Jedwabne was in the Lomza province before WWI. In 1897, there were 1,941 Jews living in the town, which is located 11 miles from Lomza and 18 miles from Kolno. By 1940, that number had dwindled significantly. After the Nazis invaded in 1941, the town became infamous for the Jedwabne pogrom on July 10, 1941, when approximately 300 Jewish residents, men, women and children, were murdered and buried in two mass graves. The following day, the Nazis rounded up the remaining Jews and transported them to a ghetto.

The Baal Hagadah says: *B'chol dor v'dor chayav adam lirot et atzmo k'elu hu yatza m'mitzrayim*. “In every generation we are obliged to consider ourselves as having personally participated in the exodus from Egypt.” All my life I could not grasp the meaning of this passage until the advent of World War II.

Among the many experiences during the terrible period of time under the furious German Nazi rule in Europe, when millions of Jews, young and old, were mercilessly persecuted and destroyed, we, a group of Jews from all parts of Europe, made careful preparations to celebrate the Holiday of Freedom, Passover. Passover

of 1943 was an experience that I shall remember always. The observance of it took place at Birkenau near Auschwitz, one of the greatest annihilation camps, built by slaves to exterminate themselves and the innocent people that would follow. Planning and preparations started right after Purim. There were many things to be taken care of. The main problem was how to get the two most necessary items, matzoh and wine for the Seder.

Greece, an independent, peaceful nation, was seized and brought under the terrifying Nazi yoke. Many Jews were living there, especially in the harbor city of Salonika. They did not expect to be removed from their homes to be killed.

They prepared *matzot*, raisins and other things for Passover. The Nazi machine took these unfortunate people out of

their city just two weeks before their Holiday of Liberation. Many transports of Jews, squeezed into unbearable sealed freight cars unfit even for



The children of Auschwitz at the liberation of the camp (1945)

animals, reached the last station of their lives – Birkenau. Their total possessions were in the small package each tied on his or her shoulder, and they were accompanied by lovely children, many of whom were carried in the arms of the parents. They were separated from their poor worldly goods by force, and the parents and the children were sent to the gas chambers.

At that time, I was assigned to a special unit, called by the peculiar name of “Canada,” whose job was to assort the belongings of murdered Jews. Thus the worldly goods of the slain Greek Jews came to our place of work. We opened the miserable packages and to our surprise found hand-baked *matzot*, raisins, and other necessary Passover products carefully prepared for the Seder. With trembling hands, knowing how meaningful these items were to the dying Jews, we hid them in a secret place to make good use of their sacred purpose. After hard and dangerous preparations in order not to be caught by the S.S. men, we finally accomplished our first task and hoped to celebrate the lovely Holiday of Freedom while being slaves in a concentration camp under the yoke of Nazi Germany.

Erev Passover 1943 was a very busy day for our special small group.

All products accumulated for the Seder and piled up at our working place had to be brought to the camp. There was great danger that the Nazi guard might search through the unit and confiscate all the things that we had so carefully saved, and in addition would administer severe punishment. Therefore, we needed the cooperation and help of our Cappel (group leader) who was also a Jew. He gladly accepted

sharing the responsibility. He also advised us to make very small packages and to distribute them to many people, and he would see to it that everything reached the camp in the best order possible.

With joy and thanks to G-d that we had succeeded in our undertaking, we came to the camp. The profound holiness of Passover made us feel neither hunger nor weariness, although we had worked very hard all day without food. We did not touch anything that was prepared for us by the camp kitchen. Our block leader, a split personality and a Pole, was informed in advance of our intention to celebrate the Passover Seder, and he promised not to interfere with our observance. Nevertheless, we had to give him a big bribe beforehand, besides a share of our meager food.

When night fell and darkness covered the earth and no other light was permitted in the block, we managed to light several candles and distribute them among the people lying in the bunks. A man guarded the door in case an S.S. man should come unexpectedly. We filled the first cup and made *kiddush* by heart without any *haggadot*.

A young boy, twelve years of age, asked “*Mah Nishtana*” saying, “Why are we Jews different from other people?” Tears flowed from everyone’s eyes and question after question found each one pondering why it is so. And since we had no *haggadot*, each one tried to give his own interpretation of the eternal question of why do we Jews suffer so much more than any other nation. Some brought out the idea that the *Maror* (bitterness) that we suffered is due to the fact that we tried to run from one *Galut* (place

of exile) to another *Galut* because we thought that what happened to our brethren yesterday will not reach us in the new places today.

All night long we were discussing the history of our people and what we expected in the future and what would happen if some of us would come out alive. No one slept and all celebrated the Pesach the entire night with tears and hopes. The discussion did not end until the gong rang that it was time to get up and go to work. And as it rang, we wished each other that we live to come out of this hell and again celebrate the Passover as free people.

The celebration of this Seder night left imprints on my soul. Now, when I perform the Passover service, I understand the meaning of the statement that each man in every generation is obliged to consider himself as if he personally was redeemed from slavery into freedom. I have some garments which I wore that Passover as a reminder of *Maror*, “*ze sh’anu ochlim, al shum mah.*” This garment that I keep, why? Because of the Holocaust that befell the Jewish People during World War II.

To learn more about **the Jews of Jedwabne**, please visit:
<https://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/jedwabne/Yedwabne.html>

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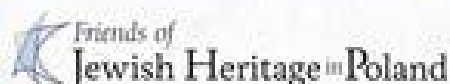


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About the JewishGen Yizkor Book Translation Project



Yizkor Books (Memorial Books) were traditionally written to memorialize the names of departed family and martyrs during holiday services in the synagogue (a practice that still exists in many synagogues today).

Over the centuries, as a result of countless persecutions and horrific atrocities committed against the

Jews, Yizkor Books (*Sifre Zikaron* in

Hebrew) were expanded to include more historical information, such as biographical sketches of famous personalities and descriptions of daily town life.

Following the Holocaust, the idea of remembrance and learning took on an urgent and crucial importance. Survivors of the Holocaust sought out other surviving residents of their former towns to memorialize and document the names and way of life of those who were ruthlessly murdered by the Nazis.

These remembrances were documented in Yizkor Books, hundreds of which were published in the first decades after the Holocaust. Most of these books were published privately, or through *landsmanshaftn* (social organizations comprised of members originating from the same European town or region) that still existed, and were often distributed free of charge.

Sadly, the languages used to document these crucial histories and links to our past, Yiddish and Hebrew, are no longer commonly understood by a significant percentage of Jews today. It is our hope that the translation of these books into English (and other languages) will assist the countless Jewish family researchers who are so desperately seeking to forge a connection with their heritage.

Thank you to Lance Ackerfeld for overseeing the Yizkor Book Translation project, and Joel Alpert for overseeing the JewishGen Press.



Lance Ackerfeld was born in Australia and settled on Kibbutz Yiftah, Israel in 1977 where he has lived with his family since then. By day, he is presently a senior database and BI expert in the global “Netafim” company and after work, devotes time to the Yizkor Book Project in which he has been involved in various capacities since 1999 and has led the project for more than 10 years.



Joel Alpert is a retired electrical engineer, who worked for MIT, Raytheon, the Israeli Armaments Authority and Bell Laboratories. He was born and educated in Wisconsin, lived in Israel, Boston and Tucson. He created the Yizkor-Books-in-Print project in 2012 and is now the coordinator of the project.

At the end of each week, we have been distributing “A Window into our Treasured Past” emails, which feature timely excerpts from Yizkor books in JewishGen’s archive. In choosing the weekly excerpts, JewishGen volunteer Bruce Drake tries to balance selections that recall the suffering of the Holocaust with chapters that paint pictures of what daily life was like in the communities of Europe, such as market days, how Jews made their living, the joys and sadnesses of every day life and portraits of memorable characters. Bruce has also overseen the completed translation of the Kover Yizkorbook and created Kehilalinks sites for Kovel and Wojnilow, now known as Voynilov in Ukraine. He spent most of his career in journalism at the New York Daily News, NPR and Congressional Quarterly, and until recently, was a senior editor at the Pew Research Center.

To learn more, and to access
the translations at no cost, please visit:
www.JewishGen.org/yizkor/translations



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