

# Latvia SIG

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## Table of Contents

President's Report	2
Treasurer's Report	6
Editor's Comments	6
Revive Your Shtetl by Rochelle Kaplan	7
My Trip to Latvia by Bruce Dumes	8
Have I got a Story to Tell by Rosalind Brandt Finkelstein	16
An Interview with Hanna Ferber (Part 2)	17
An Interview with Simon Gutman (Part 1)	21
Membership Fees Are Now Due	25
Latvia SIG Membership Questionnaire	26

## President's Report



The IAJGS annual conference was held in Chicago on August 17-22, 2008 and offered five exciting presentations of particular interest to the Latvia SIG.

Dr. Max Michelson and Prof. Ruven Ferber each gave two presentations and I gave one.

At the well-attended SIG luncheon, Dr. Max Michelson presented a History of the Riga Jewish Community. Max is the author of, *City of Life, City of Death, Memories of Riga*. In his talk he described his family history and his experiences during the Holocaust.



**Max Michelson at the IAJGS Conference**

He reviewed the early settlement of the Jews, who were excluded from Riga for most of its early years and elaborated on how, under Czarist rule, it remained outside the Pale of Settlement. In 1843 Jews were permitted to settle there, and in the late 19th century Jews flocked there from Courland and the Pale determined to share in the financial opportunities offered by its burgeoning economic development. After the Russian revolution, Riga became an important cultural and social center for East European Jewry, but it never regained its peak pre World War I Jewish population..

Prof. Ruven Ferber described the **Names Project: the Fate of the Latvian Jewish Community**. He was born in Riga and his family settled in Latvia at the end of 18th century. In addition to being a full professor of physics at the University of Latvia, he is also head of the board of the Center for Judaic Studies, which he founded in 1998 at the same university. Furthermore he is head of the project, *Jews in Latvia: Names and Fate, 1941-1945*.



**Prof. Ruven Ferber at the IAJGS Conference**

It is particularly noteworthy that on July 15, 1998 for the first time in the history of the Republic of Latvia, a Center for Judaic Studies was established at the University of Latvia.

Prof. Ferber presented a short synopsis of the history of Jews in the region from the 16th century until today and focused on the recovery of the names and fates of the prior-WW II Latvian Jewish community in the framework of the ongoing NAMES project.

He explained that since only about 25% of the victim's names are known in the Yad Vashem database, alternatives had to be developed based on archival data. The memorial list contains about 93,400 names of prior-WW II Latvian Jews. The all-sources based search of their destiny in 1941-1945, including the assistance of descendants, will help recover more victims' names. Please go to: <http://names.lu.lv/> for more information about the names project.

Max Michelson's second presentation traced the

history of the Jews in Courland from the time that they were first admitted in 1585.

He explained that while the local nobility exploited and protected the Jews, they were used as administrators and were purveyors of necessities. However, city-dwelling German burghers and craftsmen viewed the Jews as competitors and constantly clamored for their expulsion. Fortunately, the repeated expulsions were never enforced and by payments of significant sums for protection money the expulsions were regularly rescinded. Courland, he explained, was outside the Pale of Settlement. However, only Jews who were born in Courland were allowed to remain there and the conditions for Jews in Courland were significantly better than those in the Pale of Settlement.

The second presentation by Prof. Ferber, entitled, *A Web -site List of Latvian Jewry Prior to WW II*. focused on the names of the Latvian Jewish community on the eve of World War II. The list was compiled using a wide range of archival sources in Latvia and abroad. The 1935 census forms the basis of the list which is corroborated by a variety of pre-war material including inhabitants lists of 1939–1940, house lists, passports, business directories and records, birth, marriage and death records for 1935–1941 which will supplement the list with persons born at that time and will allow the exclusion from the list of persons who died during this period.

My presentation was an introduction to Internet searching for Latvian ancestors and their descendants who migrated to other lands and their extended families.

I reviewed a number of Latvian genealogical websites and also examined various search engines and analyzed some of the differences between them. The same search on different search engines generally produces different results. Various directories were also examined such as Cyndi's List and also the one-step search tools developed by Steve Morse. (see [stevemorse.org](http://stevemorse.org))

Hosted or archival solutions also play an important part in Latvian genealogical research Websites such as JewishGen have been created, main-

tained, updated, secured and improved. Many other sites providing archival solutions such as the Latvia Holocaust Jewish Names Project, Family Search, various sites owned by Generations Network and Yad Vashem, were also examined.. Also reviewed was the development of family websites and shtetl sites (shtetlinks).

The benefits of the exchange of information that flow from the social interaction sites and the rewards that come from the intergenerational communication were examined as well as the risks of giving up rights to data and images and issues of privacy.

An emerging important issue relating to donor agreements and terms of service was also reviewed. All these social interaction sites as well as many of the archival sites require the donor to cede rights pertaining to copyright and privacy. These issues are becoming more relevant since many donors are placing genealogical material on social interaction sites and archival databases.

### **Annual General Meeting**

The Latvia SIG annual meeting took place in Chicago on the 19<sup>th</sup> August 2008. I presented my report, which dealt with the wide range of SIG activities in the past year.

I thanked the following people:

Don Hirschhorn, for his dedication, innovative ideas and constructive suggestions and noted that regrettably he was not re-standing for the board.

Barry Shay, a past president, for maintaining a very high standard of editorship for the newsletter and for his work as Web Editor and who, despite his recent knee surgery, made sure he attended the conference.

Mike Getz, our treasurer, not only for his work as treasurer, but also for his guidance and leadership since the inception of the SIG.

Arlene Beare, our database coordinator, for her pioneering work in obtaining and bringing on-line many of the Latvia databases we all use.

Elsebeth Paikin, our listserv moderator, for her

continued and very necessary work in managing and growing the listserve.

Bruce Dumes, our Webmaster, was thanked for creating, designing and maintaining the Latvia SIG website.

The board members for the next year are:

- President: Henry Blumberg.
- Treasurer: Mike Getz.
- Newsletter Editor and Web Editor: Barry Shay.
- Webmaster: Bruce Dumes.
- Database Coordinator: Arlene Beare.
- List Serve Moderator: Elsebeth Paikin.
- Dvinsk and Rezekne Shtetlink Coordinator: Dave Howard

We were very pleased to present Prof. Ruven Ferber a laptop for archival use for the Names & Fates Project. Furthermore, donations were received at the meeting that would facilitate the purchase of another laptop in due course.

Mike Getz and Arlene Beare, both past presidents of the SIG, were honored by the SIG with Lifetime Achievement Awards for their dedication and contributions to the Latvia SIG and Latvian Jewish Genealogy. Since neither Mike nor Arlene were in attendance, Barry Shay accepted the award for Mike and Michael Hoffman accepted the award for Arlene.



**Barry accepting the Latvia SIG lifetime achievement award for Mike Getz from Henry**

Mike prepared the following statement expressing his thanks for the award.

*It is with deep appreciation and gratitude that I acknowledge the recognition that this award implies. Working with, and for, the Latvia SIG has been a reward in and of itself.*

*It was the product initially of family interest in Subate, a small town with strong links to Daugavpils, at the very heart of Jewish life in Latvia.*

*The SIG and its members have added to my knowledge and feeling for the Latvian Jewish community, modest in numbers but distinguished in achievement. It was a privilege to work with members to research and record the history and genealogy of the community. I recall, from earlier days, with special warmth and gratitude the driving spirits personified by Marion Werle and Deborah Levine Herman. Marion really organized the consistency and quality of our newsletter. We owe Deborah the basis of our administrative and financial systems that have served us so well.*

*The viability and vitality of the SIG in recent years owes much to the effort of our editor and past president Barry Shay, who has played an important role in contacting our members and supporting development of the website. He brings an informed and skilled approach to our interests.*

*Arlene Beare is properly honored today as a leading and generous organizer and provider of the data, which makes our activity meaningful. I value very highly the work she has done and enjoy her vigorous approach to the challenges typical of the archival world.*

*My particular thanks also go to Henry for his contribution to the SIG, taking its interests to important centers and in particular, with Arlene, bringing closer to reality our access to the 1897 All Russian Census for Daugavpils*

*Thank you again for your recognition of a modest contribution to our common interest.*

*Mike Getz  
August 2008*

In addition to the wonderful presentations at the conference, the films, SIG meetings, BOF meetings, technology workshops, interaction with fellow researchers, there are also the chance encounters and finding extended family and meeting



long-lost friends.

At the last conference in Salt Lake City I quite fortuitously met Barry Levene and he opened the doors to a complete branch of my grandmother's Lochowitz family. This was followed up in Chicago by meeting Zalman Usiskin who provided further information about our extended family.

In Chicago I also met Rolph Lederer a founding member and past president of the Toronto Genealogical Society. We had both been students at the University of Cape Town (about fifty years ago !) and he told me that he had a photo of the two of us taken at a student Jewish association retreat in the 50's. That called for an update!

### **Trip to Latvia and Lithuania.**

Since the last newsletter my wife Marcia and our eldest son, Jonathan, and I traveled to Latvia. It enabled me to do further research and spend some time with the wonderful family that I have discovered there and the friends that I have made since starting my genealogical quest. From Latvia we were joined with additional family members to travel to ancestral shtetls in Lithuania. I hope to write more about the visit in future issues.

### **Support for Nomination of Howard Margol**

The IAJGS lifetime achievement award was presented to Howard Margol for his many years of pioneering work in Lithuanian Jewish Genealogy research. His work has also had a significant impact on Latvian genealogy as research related to either Latvia or Lithuania impacts on the other.

As president of the Latvia SIG and also from a personal perspective, I was very pleased to support the nomination of Howard Margol by the JGS of Tampa Bay for the 2008 IAJGS Lifetime Achievement and I am delighted that he received the award.

He has willingly shared the wealth of information he has acquired over the years with all of us interested in Lithuanian and Latvian genealogy and for that we owe him a debt of gratitude.

### **JewishGen and Ancestry Agreement**

On August 22, 2008 Warren Blatt, the managing director of JewishGen announced the cooperative agreement with Ancestry.com. He stated that the basics of the agreement were that JewishGen will make some of its databases available on the Ancestry website and Ancestry will provide hardware and network support for the JewishGen website.

I think Gary Mokotoff, the Editor of The E-zine of Jewish Genealogy From Avotaynu in Volume 9, Number 23, October 14, 2008 summed it up appropriately when he wrote:

*"The alliance between Ancestry.com and JewishGen will likely usher in a new age of cooperation between for-profit and non-profit institutions. Non-profits own valuable databases that for-profits are willing to pay to license. Non-profits like JewishGen have become victims of their own success, financially, finding their growth inhibited by the cost of maintaining all of the wonderful volunteer effort of its contributors. Now that financial pressure can be eased by alliances with for-profit companies."*

*"JewishGen has created a good template for these alliances. As a non-profit, they are merely licensing their databases and will remain autonomous of Ancestry. Since the JewishGen data will always be available free of charge at their site, it discourages Ancestry from bundling it with their fee-for-service components."*

### **Membership Dues**

Membership dues are continuing and our membership is increasing. These dues help us with the invaluable work of our SIG. If you have not yet sent your membership fees please renew as soon as possible by sending your check to Mike Getz or by using PayPal. For the convenience of members we accept, in addition to the 1-year membership of \$25 (\$30 foreign), a multi-year membership at \$25 (\$30 foreign) for the first year and \$20 (\$25 foreign) for each subsequent year. The cost of membership covers the production and distribution of the newsletter, testimony translations, database acquisitions and other expenses of the SIG.

Again, thanks to Barry Shay, our editor, who has produced yet another splendid edition of our

newsletter. There are a number of past copies on the website for easy reference.

All the best and with SIG's greetings.

Henry Blumberg  
henry@blumbergs.ca

### **Treasurer's Report**

Our bank balance on July 1, 2007 was \$4,750 and stood at \$6,263 on June 30, 2008. Income of \$2,600 was made up of subscription fees and some contributions. We appear to have a core of subscribers who represent a stable membership at this level. The modest increase of fees was also of help.

Expenditures for the year was \$1,094. Principal items were the printing and mailing of the newsletter, translator's fees, and modest subscription fees to the WJC, AJC and the Simon Wiesenthal Center, organizations that provide us with updates and news on the Latvian Jewish community and its history, and an initial payment in support of obtaining database material from the Archives in Riga.

I want to pay tribute to our editor, Barry Shay, for his work on the newsletter as well as maintaining contact and responding to the interests of our members. The content of the newsletter remains at a high standard. It is supplied, on request, to leading organizations and academic institutions interested in our field of activity. Barry has also organized the data of our membership and mailing lists in a manner that has considerably assisted my own modest role.

I need to mention the long-standing and important work of Arlene Beare in negotiating with the Latvia Archives to acquire the important 1897 Russian Census for Dvinsk. The data will be coming to us over a period of time. This challenging project has had the active involvement of our president, Henry Blumberg and was strongly supported by his leadership. We have been able to provide initial financial support but the SIG needs to commit itself to raising additional funds.

The SIG begins its year in a fairly sound position reflected both in our funding and membership. The potential to improve does exist and may be

necessary to achieve our genealogy goals. Possibly some consideration should be given to expanding these underlying fundamentals to our role in the study of Latvian Jewry, its families and history.

I regret not being able to join you at this Conference and wish you well in your discussions and deliberations. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions, comments, or suggestions.

Mike Getz  
mikegetz005@comcast.net

### **Editor's Comments**

This issue of the newsletter is the first of the 2008/2009 membership year and, consequently, includes material covered at the IAJGS conference held in Chicago this past August. Henry Blumberg was kind enough to describe most of the activities of interest to the Latvia SIG membership, which was quite substantial. We were fortunate to have both Prof. Ruven Ferber and Dr. Max Michelson present interesting material concerning Latvia of the past as well as current efforts in Latvia to memorialize those who perished in the Holocaust, as discussed by Henry in the President's Report.

Of continuing interest to the SIG is the development of shtetlinks, which provide both historical and genealogical information to the membership. As mentioned in previous newsletters, of particular interest is the creation of shtetlinks that focus on the families and their activities just before the Holocaust. Developing such shtetlinks is an ongoing effort of JewishGen and many SIGs. There are a number of Latvian shtetlinks available for viewing via the Latvia SIG web-site and we would like to add many more. In this regard, Rochelle Kaplan—a long-time member of the Latvia SIG—was kind enough to describe what the Ariogala Research Group has accomplished in developing the Ariogala shtetlink. It would be wonderful if one of you would volunteer to begin a similar project for a Latvian shtetl of interest. I am sure there are SIG members who would be eager to get involved. Please contact Henry or me and we will support you as best we can.

In the June 2007 issue of the Latvia SIG (Vol. 11, Issue 4) newsletter Bruce Dumes, the SIG web-

master, wrote a beautiful article about how he began his genealogy research on the Dumes family from Vishki. He uncovered an enormous amount of information with the help of other SIG members and the State Historical Archives in Riga. In that article Bruce indicated his desire to visit Latvia and Vishki and to visit the cemetery where many of his relatives are buried. Luckily for all of us, Bruce not only visited Vishki but wrote about his trip and I am pleased to include his account of the visit in this issue of the newsletter. Bruce's trip was remarkable in many ways, but most remarkable to many of us, I am sure, is that Bruce discovered new cousins who are descendants of relatives who survived the Holocaust.

Finding new cousins is always exciting and in many cases it is the result of many months or years of painstaking research. Not long ago I received an e-mail from Rosalind Brandt Finkelstein telling me that she had a story to tell that she thought would be suitable for the newsletter. She sent it and I am happy to include it in the newsletter. It is a delightful story of cousins connecting by pure chance and coincidence aided by archival data from the State Historical Archives in Riga.

I am happy to include Part 2 of the testimony of Hanna Ferber. When I asked Ruven Ferber in Chicago whether he was related to Hanna, he informed me that he is her son; another remarkable coincidence. Since I did not have a photo of Hanna, I asked Ruven if he could e-mail me one when he got back to Riga and so he did, and now you can see Hanna as she appears now. There will also be a Part 3 of Hanna's testimony in a future issue.

While putting together this issue, I received another translation and I thought I'd include a small part of it in this issue. The complete testimony is quite long, so I will present it in a few parts. Sofija (Sonia) Kagna, who did the translation of Simon Gutman's testimony, went well beyond what I expected and added historical context so that the testimony makes sense to those of us who are not very familiar with the historical and theatrical situation in Russia and Latvia during Simon's lifetime. Simon Gutman, born at the beginning of the first Russian revolution of 1905, survived World War I, the Russian civil war

(1917 revolution) the fight for Latvia's independence, the Holocaust and World War II.

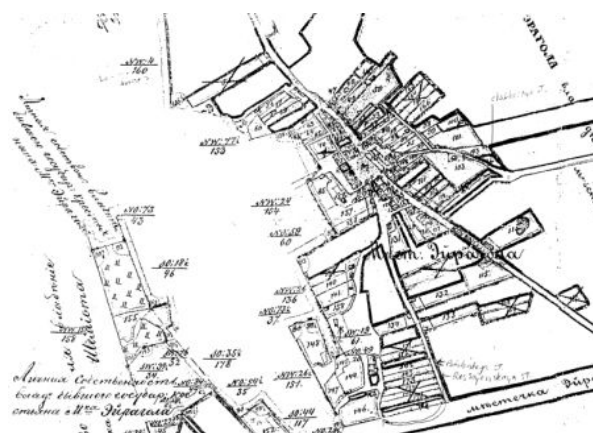
As many of you know, we now offer the newsletter in hard copy or as a PDF file to paid members of the SIG. If you have not done so already, please let me know your preference when you renew your membership. Since the PDF version contains color photographs and usually runs about 20 to 30 pages, I would only recommend this version to those of you who have wide-band (cable, DSL, fiber, etc.) access to the Internet.

Please remember that the yearly membership has now ended so please rejoin or renew your membership in the SIG. Details are included later in this issue and can be found on the Latvia SIG website.

Barry Shay  
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## **Revive Your Shtetl** **By** **Rochelle Kaplan**

At the Chicago IAJGS Conference, the talk, *Town-Wide Research: Bringing Your Shtetl to Life*, presented by Sonia Hoffman of the Jewish Family History Foundation, has resonance for the Latvia SIG.



**Old Map of Ariogala**

The Ariogala Research Group has recreated and brought to life their ancestral shtetl, by sharing family information and pooling resources to obtain complete records for Ariogala, Lithuania.

They have reconstructed the lives of their families and the workings of the Jewish community over a 250-year period, from the Grand Duchy through the Holocaust.

Records listing all the town's residents were used to uncover the relationships among families and to follow them to other towns. Correspondence files in Lithuanian archives and at YIVO in NYC show how community leaders interacted with government bureaucrats to provide services for Jewish families. Newspapers, memoirs and family photographs helped complete a portrait of life in one town. Personal visits provided a sense of place and led to new information. Group members photographed the town, determined which buildings predated WWII and catalogued the remnants of the Jewish cemetery. They met elderly residents who shared memories of their Jewish neighbors and local students eager to learn about a forgotten population of their town.

Records used were: revision (census) lists, tax, voter and conscription lists, applications for internal passports and to become farmers, correspondence with government agencies, bank and inheritance records, Landsmanshaftn (burial society) cemetery plots, Pages of Testimony from Yad Vashem, architectural drawings of Jewish sites, street maps with matching real estate lists showing where families lived, Yiddish newspaper articles, photos, letters, interviews and memoirs.

The Ariogala group used these major sources: (1) family members of researchers in the research group, (2) major records such as vital records, revision and tax lists, property records, military lists and archive holdings from the Kaunas Regional Archive and the Lithuanian Central State Archive, Belarus and Ukraine Archives, YIVO in NYC and NARA (3) Museums. The Vilna Museum was cited; Ms. Hoffman also recommended local, smaller museums.

Some specific data found were the 1846 Ariogala Candle Tax List and Revision Lists of 1795, 1806, 1811, 1816, 1834, 1850, 1858 and the All Russia Census of 1895-1897. Note that in 1795 Jews were registered only for taxes and conscription; in 1834, surnames were fixed. These yielded info such as name, son of \_\_\_\_\_, occupation, age,

address, town came from, family members and their relationships to head. Voter and tax lists from various years gave more information. So did early maps found in museums and real estate owners' lists. Passport applications yielded additional facts and sometimes photos. FHL films listed birth records. The Library of Congress had some pertinent historical information. Visiting the town with a photographer presented opportunities to match drawings and town maps with actual buildings and streets. Having old postcards helped. So did interviewing the town's elders. One lady who visited the town could read Hebrew and she translated 50 headstones. A fairly complete picture of Ariogala emerged from the collective research of a committed few.

The Litvak SIG began in 1997. The following year, the head archivist of Lithuania came to the IAJGS conference in LA. Lots have been accomplished in a decade.

How might other researchers do a similar project for their town? Hoffman suggested organizing a group of people. If you have a shtetl page, people will find you, so make a shtetl link. Pool resources. Contact members of a SIG, shtetl group and YIVO. Prepare family synopses to share. Hoffman answered someone's question about a town with only five Jewish families by stating that they were part of a larger Jewish community, so cast the net more widely to neighboring shtetlach. This seems an ideal project for Latvia SIG, perhaps as a pilot project, for a group with a shtetl links page and active members. For further information, contact the Hoffmans at Ariogala-roots@aol.com or JewishFamilyHistory.org.

## **My Trip to Latvia** **by** **Bruce Dumes**

(with a little editing help from my lovely wife Debra)

I wrote in a previous newsletter about how I found Vishki, the Latvian shtetl where my paternal grandfather was born and raised until he was ten years old.

Before June 2006 my family didn't know what country Vishki was in, or even if Vishki still existed. I only knew that my grandfather said that I



could remember the town's name because it rhymed with whisky. Two years ago I did a search on Google and found Vishki mentioned on the JewishGen website, and in one of the newsletters I found a list of graves from the Jewish cemetery there.

Hoping for further help I wrote to Arlene Beare who kindly sent me PDFs of the newsletter. Included in the list was what appeared to be the grave of my great-grandfather. I had an old photo of the grave, so I wrote to Alex Feigmanis in Latvia, who sold photos of the cemetery's headstones, and told him that I was going to be attending a family reunion the following week where I'd give a presentation of our family history, as I knew it at that time. I wired Alex the money and he sent me an email with the photo. It was indeed the same grave. What an amazing thing to show to my relatives! Not only do we know at last where we came from, but the grave of our ancestor still stands.

In March 2007 I decided to travel to Latvia to see Vishki, and I started to teach myself to speak Russian. Everyone told me, "Don't bother! Everyone speaks English." This, I found, was not entirely true, even in Riga...but more about that in a bit.

My wife and I decided to do a family history tour. We went to Germany and Denmark to see her old family places. She has been able to trace some of her family roots to the 1500's! The last part of our trip was Latvia.

We took a flight from Hamburg to Riga on Friday evening, and spent all Saturday exploring.

Riga is indeed a beautiful city, much more than I expected. In addition to the Old City, for which it is justifiably well known, Riga has wonderful parks and gardens planted with taste and care. We first ventured out about 10AM, just as it had just stopped raining, and things were very at first, but after a couple of hours everything burst into life and color. The Old City has so much to offer visually at every turn.

We were pleased to see that food and drink are extremely reasonable in Latvia. Lodgings tend to

be more expensive in Riga, catering to the business traveler with a big expense account. But then again, compared to other major cities like LA, New York, San Francisco, and Boston, the price of our hotel room was extremely reasonable. The hotel we stayed in was not opulent by anyone's definition, but my wife liked the bathroom. The air conditioning mentioned on the hotel's web page turned out to be a nice white fan on the desk. Still, we didn't go there for the luxury accommodations, and we did get free wi-fi, which is a must for my wife and me when we travel.



Service at the Old Synagogue in Riga

We walked to the synagogue in the old town section. It survived WWII only because the Nazis worried that burning it might cause a fire through all of Old Town, the buildings being so close together. It's beautiful inside. There was a gentleman who allowed me to borrow his kipa so that I could step inside and see it. It is in the orthodox tradition, with men and women separated, so we didn't go in for the service, but I did sneak a picture from the entryway.

I went into several small shops where they spoke no English, so I got a little practice for my five months worth of self-taught Russian. Amazingly enough, I was able to communicate on a very basic level. Everyone in Latvia understands Rus-

sian. Younger people in Riga speak Latvian to a greater degree, and over time, I'm sure that will increase. But certainly people over the age of forty speak little to no Latvian. Outside of Riga, Latvia becomes rural very quickly and in Eastern Latvia, where Vishki is located, few people speak Latvian or English.

We had a lovely dinner with my friend Leizer Dumesh and his son Genrikh. Leizer is not related to me, even though we share the same surname (now spelled Dumes, mine was Dumesh in Latvia) and his grandfather lived next to my great-grandfather, according to the 1897 Russian Census (Latvia was a part of Russia then). Initially we felt that we must be related, but his grandson Vadim and I did a DNA test and found that we haven't been related, at least via our Y-DNA, for at least 10,000 years! The restaurant was fun and one of the highlights is that if you order trout, you can watch as they catch the trout from the pool in the basement. No kidding! Go to: <http://www.piekristapa.lv/>

Before leaving the U.S. I had arranged for an Avis rental car so that we could drive from Riga to Daugavpils, which is about 10 miles from Vishki. I had done this in advance because I'd heard that you can get a much better price that way.

I had arranged to pick up the rental car in Riga and decided to walk to the rental office. It was further than I expected, about a mile or two—and when I reached the office it was closed.

This was curious! The Avis Internet site (<http://www.avis.lv>) said they were open 8 am to 6 pm on weekends. I went back to the hotel and tried to call the Avis office at the airport, but nobody answered, even though the website said they were open.

So we decided to take a cab to the airport and check out the situation. When we arrived at the Avis booth I told the young lady what my morning had been like. She mentioned that she had actually gone to the place where I was supposed to pick up the car at 9AM, and she waited about thirty minutes for me (because of the length of the walk I didn't get there until about 9:45), and since

she was the only person working at AVIS that day, she had to go back to the airport where she was also supposed to work. This meant there was no AVIS car for me! It was sitting in downtown Riga. I had to keep reminding myself, "This is not the U.S. This is not the U.S."

So, we went next door to the National rent-a-car office. Before traveling I had asked a number of people for advice. One of the interesting bits of advice that I got from Len Latkovski was to rent a car from a "Rent-A-Wreck" place, so I told the guy at National that I wanted a car that was the least likely car to get stolen. He said, "I have *just* the car for you." The car ran fine, but cosmetically, as promised, would deter anyone from stealing it for quick resale.

The drive from Riga to Daugavpils was longer than I expected because the "major highway" across Latvia is what we would call a two-lane country road. If you get behind a slow moving truck, you need to wait for a clear stretch of highway in front of you before you can pass it, unless you're Latvian, in which case you pass whether you can see the road clearly or not. So you have to keep your eyes peeled for Latvian drivers headed toward you at 120 kilometers per hour.

Before my trip, I found an email address for something called the Daugavpils Tourist Information Center. I wrote to them asking if they have any information about Vishki. To my surprise, a lady named Lolita Kozlovska wrote me back and said that she was born in Vishki and goes there every weekend to visit her mother. She said that if I came in on a weekend, she would show me around. She said she could introduce me to an elderly lady named Veronika Galvena, who remembered Vishki before the WWII.

We finally got to Vishki at about 4 pm (I had originally been shooting for noon). I called Lolita. She said, "Wait ten minutes!" and as promised appeared with her husband and son, and started to show us around.

On first look, Vishki seemed like a ghost town. We didn't see anyone. Many of the homes seemed abandoned, and on the outside of town were several dormitory-like buildings with windows bro-

ken, nothing but cats jumping through them. After a few minutes we noticed that outside many of the broken windows were satellite dishes! As my daughter Nicole put it, "Windows - optional, 'Everybody Loves Raymond' - necessity!".

I have to say, each day that we returned to Vishki, it seemed warmer and more neighborly. On the second day of our visit we saw children walking and riding bikes, people coming home carrying flowers. By our third day there, we were completely charmed by Vishki. My wife says she wants to move there!

Lolita showed us a few homes that Veronika had earlier identified to her as homes that had belonged to Dumesh families. These homes were on what is now called Aglonas Iela. We then followed the road and went to the Jewish cemetery.

It's impossible for me to put into words all the emotions I felt when standing in the Jewish cemetery of Vishki. It was an overwhelming feeling, even deeply spiritual. Most of the several hundred graves are not in any kind of orderly placement and the headstones were in all levels of disrepair. We didn't stay there too long because we planned on coming back the next day. Lolita and her family then took us to the site of the memorial, placed at the site where Vishki's Jews were executed in 1941.



**Vishki Memorial for Jews Executed in 1941**

Next we drove to the site of the old synagogue of Vishki, near the center of town. There are only fragments of the foundation left to mark the spot – it's left just as it was when destroyed by the Nazis in 1941. Lolita's husband then drove to pick up his daughter who was at a friend's home. The daughter spoke English better than Lolita and thought she'd be helpful for translating. I recalled what my friend Leizer Dumesh had said about the town: he and his family had lived right next door to the synagogue.



**Veronika Galvena**

Then we went to see Veronika who currently lives in a nursing home: a very unhappy, unclean place. She's in very poor health and, on her spare old age pension, can't afford much in the way of medication or supplies. But she was willing to tell us what she remembered. Here's part of the conversation we had with Lolita. *The transcription and translation from Latgalian was done by Professor Len Latkovski, and I'm very much in his debt for this effort. Latgalian is not Latvian. It is a language spoken only by older residents of Latgale and is largely lost. For more information, see Professor Latkovski's website, the Latgale Research Center: <http://www.hood.edu/academics/html/latgale/index.shtml>*

Veronika (V) [Crying]

Lolita (L) [Calms her] everything is all right, do not cry. Everything is all right. We have visitors. These people have come from America, Jewish people from America. They have come here to talk to you. [to us ] She is very ill, and she does not like this place.

V: Dumeshi?? Are they Dumeshi? There was the synagogue...you saw it?

L: Yes, yes. We showed it.

V: The other [Dumesh] brother lived opposite Ilze Petrovna near the synagogue.

L: She tells about this house in Vishki where two families lived, two brothers Dumeshi.



**Veronika on the far left at her mother's funeral.  
Next to her is Tanya Dumesh**

B: Do you remember the brothers' names?

V: I only remember as Dumesh; Dobka, Tsilya, Tanya

L: But in which years did these people live? In the 1930's?

V: They were brothers, cousins. I know one daughter now lives in Daugavpils; Tanya... daughter [of] Tanya...What is her name? [It is hard to remember] since I get upset...

L: She tells about one woman who is Dumesheva from Dumesh family she lives in Daugavpils. She is Tanya's daughter who lives in Daugavpils. But does not remember [her] name.

V: There were Tsilya, Tanya, Dobka. Tanya was the oldest. We were friends. These Dumesh near the synagogue [had a] store [from which] we purchased products. Now Tanya's daughter lives in Daugavpils. Tanya is now deceased. Those near the Synagogue had a store and a place for wool. They made wool from a machine. When we were

small children we played and rolled this machine. It was interesting for us. We were friends. I was a friend with more...

L: This man's grandfather [was born in Vishki]. [In the] early 1900's he traveled to America...do you remember anything like that? He has photos...his great-grandfather is buried in the cemetery. He is a descendent. They will go to the cemetery and try to decipher the inscriptions.

V: As well as I can remember in my childhood. The [Germans] arrived and they took them away and shot them.

V: They called me 'Yiddishe goye' because I was a friend of theirs. They spoke well. I understood and spoke Yiddish. They were my friends. We all lived together. There were many Jewish friends. They helped me very much. [They] helped us build a house. The Jews [crying] if it were not for the Jews, I would not be here. I would not be here without Jewish people. I was young and sick and they sent me to Riga.

L: [to us] She was young and very ill and they [the Jewish community] collected money and [sent her] to hospital in Riga.

V: They were good people. If there were Jewish people today, I would not have to live here [in old-age home]. They would help me.

B: Tell us what Vishki was like when you were small, what it was like when you were growing up.

V: The houses were quite prosperous but simple, one house next to another. Most were merchants. [They] were very good people, very helpful.

L: Do you remember the time when they shot the people? We were in that spot and we showed and we told about it. My grandmother (Baba) told me.

V: They took the men and drove to Daugavpils. Later they had said they were taking them to do work. And later they took the women and children. One woman named Tauka lived on our street...at night she escaped with a child. [She] came to the house. My father went out and looked



[and saw] Tauka with her child. [They would not] come in and we put bread in a hat [and] took bread out to the mother. [They] left and went as far as Aglona, but there she was apprehended... and with that little boy. Those are the kind of times they were.

R: In Vishki, they shot the Jews from Dagda?

V: In Vishki from Dagda, being taken to Daugavpils...they had grown tired. They were on the hill [and] could not go farther and people were killed at this spot.

L: How old were you?

V: 13 or 14

V: I am very grateful to the Jews, very grateful. [When] I was with them [they called me] 'Yiddishe goy'. Thank you for coming here.

*[note: after returning to the US, I sent a little money to Veronika to help with her medications. She told me through Lolita that she feels, once again, that her friends the Jews have given her a reason to live. It must have been awfully hard to live with the memories of seeing all her friends taken away and killed.]*

After our emotional talk with Veronika we drove to Daugavpils to find our hotel. Before the trip, I read both the "Lonely Planet" and "Bradt" travel guide books. "Lonely Planet" described Daugavpils in this way:

*[Daugavpils is] a drab, post-WWII Soviet creation and so depressing to visit it's almost a national joke – a skyline of smoke stacks and the lumbering grey hulk of Daugavpils prison overlook the southern approach. Downtown Daugavpils is a typical Soviet city centre of straight streets arranged in a strict grid, a couple of large squares, a desolate park with a black marble monument to those who died in WWII (and an eternal flame that no longer burns), and a mixture of pre-WWII and Soviet-era buildings.*

Ouch! It's not inaccurate strictly speaking, but fails to note the charming people of Daugavpils, who were warm and welcoming. And we had a lovely time walking around. We found a nice Ukrainian restaurant and had a great time there. We loved the hotel where we stayed, the Hotel

Dinaberg, which Lolita had recommended (<http://www.hoteldinaburg.lv/>). At the time, it was an amazing bargain, about \$30/night. I just checked and, not surprisingly, prices have sharply increased. They are now charging 42 euros per night (\$52 as I type). But again, free Wi-Fi! And they have a restaurant and bar.

The next day we drove back to Vishki to spend more time in the cemetery. My goal was to photograph every grave and then, once back in the U.S., get a translation of every legible grave. I was unprepared for what would be required to do this. I should have brought tools with me, because many of the graves were covered by earth. I dug what I could with my hands and shoes, but it had rained the night before and it wasn't pleasant or easy to do without tools. Still, I did what I could.

*[ Note: For the past few years, a German priest named Klaus Peter Rex has led a group of international youths to various sites of abandoned Jewish cemeteries in Europe and to restore them, as much as possible. In July 2008, the Jewish Cemetery of Vishki was selected. Klaus sent me photos of most of the graves. Unfortunately, some were inadvertently missed, and Klaus plans to visit the cemetery again to finish the photos. My friend Christine Usdin, another descendant of Vishki roots, and I have been assembling information about Vishki and the cemetery. I've created a webpage using the map drawn by Klaus of the cemetery. This page is interactive, so that if you mouse over a grave, it will show you a photo of the grave (if available) and a transcription (if available). There's also a drop-down list in the upper right-hand corner where you can select a name and the grave will become red so that you can locate it. <http://www.dumes.net/JewishCemeteryOfVishki/> ]*

I found the grave of my great-grandfather, Chaim Yehushua Dumesh. His headstone is barely legible now, but I had an old photo of it taken before WWII (maybe earlier) and sent by relatives. I traced the letters on the stone with my fingers and it was the very same as the photo. The stone is one of the largest in the cemetery, in the opposite corner from the cemetery gate, and must have had a very pretty view of the lake when the trees surrounding the cemetery were small.

I thought of my grandfather, standing at this site in 1904, just two years old when his father died and again in 1911, then nine years old and just

about to leave for America. He must have known that he'd never see it again.

After our morning in the cemetery we drove back through Vishki taking photos and movies from the car window. This was one of the things I really wanted to do, so I could understand (as much as possible) Vishki's size, how many homes were there, how far apart they were, etc. So I made a movie about "driving through Vishki" to show my relatives. ( <http://dumes.net/DrivingThruVishki.html> )



had moved to Daugavpils, whom Veronika had mentioned as well.

The next day we drove back to Vishki and met Janis Kudins, who is the mayor of the nearby town of Spogi. Vishki seems to be under his municipal umbrella. Janis brought along his nephew (also called Janis) who spoke English well enough to translate. Janis showed us the local schools and the countryside, which is very beautiful. He also took us to the Vishki train station, a very old building and certainly the place where my relatives embarked on their trip to America.



**Bruce with the Gravestone of his Great-grandfather Chaim Yehushua Dumesh and an Earlier Photograph of the Same Gravestone**

As we neared the street where the synagogue used to be I saw an older man tending his garden. With my five months worth of Russian skills I decided to try talking with him and said hello. I told him that my grandfather had been born in Vishki. He seemed shocked, and asked me the name. When I said "Dumesh", he said (in Russian), "Oh, yes, Dumesh, I remember them. They were in that house over there," and he pointed to one of the houses that Veronika had identified as a Dumesh home. He also spoke of a Dumesh who

This rail line is the Saint Petersburg/Warsaw line and was very important to the region in the early 1900's. After our tour we headed back Daugavpils and the following day drove back to Riga, already missing Vishki's charms.

When we returned to the U.S., I decided that I wanted to continue my Russian studies and began taking classes in Russian at UCLA, where I work, and I am still attending classes.

A few months after we returned I received an



email from Lolita, our Vishki tour guide. She said that Veronika, whom we visited at the nursing home, had spoken of her friend Tanya Dumesh, and that Tanya had a daughter who'd moved to Daugavpils, but she didn't remember her name. Lolita had done some research and she sent me the address of the person she believed to be the daughter of Tanya.

I wrote, in the best Russian I could manage at that point, to Julia Aleskevica in Daugavpils. I told her about the research I'd been doing and directed her to my website, which listed a family tree for my ancestors in Vishki, constructed from information gained from the LSHA (Latvian Archives).



**Tanya Dumes 1940**

About two weeks later, I received an email from Julia's daughter Marina saying that Julia was indeed Tanya's daughter, and granddaughter of Nota Dumesh, who was my grandfather's 1<sup>st</sup> cousin, so Julia and I are 3<sup>rd</sup> cousins. We've developed a regular correspondence now, and these days I email Marina and her sister Tanya regularly (in Russian!). We hope to go

back to Latvia to meet them next summer. Julia sent me stories about how her mother survived the war, and also photos of her family.

Julia has filled in a lot of their family history for me. During the 1920s and 1930s many young people looking for work began to leave Vishki and moved to larger cities like Daugavpils (formerly Dvinsk -- it became known as Daugavpils after Latvian independence in 1919) and Riga.

In January 1941, my cousin Tanya Dumesh left her home in Vishki for Riga. She found work there in a clothing factory. She was able to find an apartment and in the spring her sister Tsilya joined her and worked manufacturing goods for the war.

In June the war reached Riga. Tsilya was evacuated along with others in the factory, and Tanya was able to escape, accompanying her landlord's family. It was an arduous and perilous journey, at times on foot and sometimes on freight or cattle trains with bombs exploding around them. Tanya and Tsilya lost track of each other. Tanya finally found safety in the Ural mountains, 1000 km or more from Vishki. Tanya met a fellow called Dmitri and in 1944 they had a baby girl named Raisa. Dmitri died before the end of the war, and Tanya was, once again, on her own.

In 1946 she was reunited with her sister Tsilya. Tsilya was working in a war factory in the Urals. She decided to leave the Urals, but Tanya stayed behind. In 1947 Tanya met Semyon Macevich from Leningrad who had been exiled during one of Stalin's purges, and was living in the Urals. They were married, and by January 1948 the period of exile was over. Semyon's family urged them to return to Leningrad. Their happiness was short-lived however, because on January 21, Semyon died of a heart attack. Tanya was once again left alone with a 3 year old and another baby on the way. Tanya buried Semyon in the village of Vacha in the Urals and left for Leningrad to have her baby. Tanya gave birth to Julia in May 1948 in Leningrad.



**Raisa, Tanya and Julia Dumesh**

After Semyon's death, his family told Tanya that they could not help her. She had nowhere to go, so with a baby and a toddler she decided to return home to Vishki.

Tanya's two sisters, Liba and Doba were killed along with their parents in 1941 in Vishki, along with most of the other Jewish residents. She had no family left, and two young girls to raise on her own, but the people of Vishki helped her as they could.



**Newfound Cousins in Daugavpils  
Marina, Julia and Tanya**

Tanya was a strong and spirited woman. There was little work, so even making enough money to buy food was difficult. In 1955, Tanya began working a sewing workshop in Vishki, in the house that had once belonged to her Uncle Israel. From 1948 until 1957, Tanya and her daughters lived in a rented house, but in 1957, the government gave her a room in her Uncle's house.

In 1962 Tanya was given an apartment of 11 meters with a common kitchen in a three story building. At this time she worked as a nurse in the hospital in Vishki, which was Boris Usdin's house. There she lived until she passed away in 1989.

**Have I Got a Story to Tell!**  
by  
**Rosalind Brandt Finkelstein**

I work with a plastic surgeon, Elliot. We are good friends especially because his mother, like my father, was from Latvia and his father, like my

mother, was from Bialystok. He has seen all of my documents and is thus familiar with my family. Elliot has an office in Rhode Island and is there about once a week. He also performs surgery at the hospital there. One day he told me that the male nurse anesthetist who often works with him at the hospital told him that his grandmother was from Riga, Latvia—the same city that Elliot's mother was from. Elliot was so excited that he said he had to meet the grandmother and talk to her. It was arranged and Elliot went to Pawtucket, RI to meet the grandmother whose name is Shulamit. As it turned out, Shulamit had lived in Riga before coming to this country in 1992 but had spent the early years of her life in Tuckum, a city in Latvia and in inner Russia where she had lived during the war years.

In his conversation with Shulamit she mentioned her maiden name and her mother's maiden name. Her mother's maiden name was Brandt.

Elliot's ears perked up upon hearing this, as he knows well that my maiden name is Brandt. Then she told him that she had lost a brother in the war. His name was Simon. This really got Elliot excited, as he knows that in every generation of my father's family there was a Simon. On his way home Elliot called to tell me all of this. I said I would get in touch with Shulamit and go to see her. Meanwhile Elliot told her grandson Feliks about me so when I called Shulamit she knew who I was. My husband and I went to visit her and we had a very pleasant visit. Shulamit knows very little English and we don't speak Russian. Nonetheless, we managed in Yiddish with a lot of Russian thrown in by Shulamit. I brought my family tree, which was done by the Latvian State Historical Archives. When she looked at my family tree she remarked that one of the names on it was the same as her grandfather's. She didn't make much of it and since she's 92 years old I didn't want to press her. Likewise, I didn't think discussing DNA testing would make any sense to her.

I tracked down her grandson's address and telephone number a few days later and called him. He was aware that I had visited his grandmother. He said he would pay her a visit and try to figure things out. A few days later he emailed me and



**Brandt Family in Tukum**

**Shulamit is the second person on the left in the first row. Shulamit's grandfather Elje Brandt (my great great uncle) is the third person on the right in the second row. He has the beard. Shulamit says that except for her, everyone in the picture either died by natural causes or was killed in the war. We both never thought that there was anyone left in our Brandt family so we are both very thankful.**



**Shulamit's son Khairy (pronounced Harry), Shulamit, myself, my husband Norman and Feliks who is Khairy's son and Shulamit's grandson.**

told me that unbeknownst to him, Shulamit also had her family tree done by the State Archives before she left Latvia. A few days later he

emailed me and told me that he had seen her family tree and that my great grandfather, Lasar Brandt and her grandfather, Elje Brandt were brothers. There is no doubt that this is true.

A few weeks later Shulamit, her son Khairy and Feliks her grandson came to my house. Shulamit brought photographs and we had a wonderful visit. Both she and I thought that there were no more members of the Brandt family as a result of the Holocaust so we are both very happy. Meanwhile I have found some other Brandts with Latvian roots and we are going to see about DNA testing.

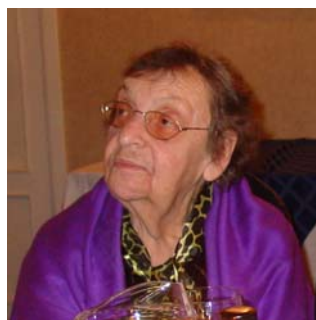
*In a subsequent note, Rosalind said that her nephew had a DNA test, since he is the son of the son of the son. There was a 12 marker match with a person named Brandt in Denmark whose family was originally from Latvia, but he is unwilling to have more markers analyzed to get a definitive result, although Rosalind feels that they probably have a common ancestor. She is also waiting for another Brandt in California to have his DNA tested since she suspects that they are related. She also heard from a Brandt in Australia who says his family was from Liepaja, the same city her father was from. With Rosalind's encouragement he said he would have his DNA tested.*

## **An Interview with Hanna Ferber, Part 2**

Recorded December 18, 2001

Interviewed by Svetlana Kovalchuk

Translated from Russian to English by Inga Long



So, after my father's death I went again to Pugo. I quite often went to the representative – I was buying the newspaper "Cina" ("The Fight"). I told him: "They are drafting me into the Army. My mother would be without her caretaker". But he explained to me that it wasn't the Latvian division recruiting me, they didn't need me and he couldn't help me. The War Committee wasn't under his influence.

I started to attend radio operator classes where they were teaching more than that – how to dismantle and put together the gun. I couldn't re-

member all the details since I didn't speak any Russian.

Then Pugo gave me advice. Since I had a problem with my lungs, I had follow-up care; therefore I was not fit for service. Yes, at the war commissariat there was some kind of commission, which approved me and I couldn't get a different assignment. But later through that hospital where Luba was working (she graduated nurse's classes back in Riga and in the hospital they noticed her skill and hired her and she knew Russian) I got an appointment with the commission again. They noticed that I had follow-on care for tuberculosis and immediately gave me the papers stating that I was not fit for service. When I gave the papers to the major he almost hit me – who let me to go to the commission. I told him: "I went there because it really hurts, I can't laugh or breath and I can't attend the classes." During the classes we had to crawl. That's how I managed to get out of the classes.

I made a promise to myself. If I was released from the classes I will give 10 rubles to the first poor person I met. That's what I did.

Yes, Pugo explained to me: "If you work in a civilian organization, they will not leave you alone. You have to go to work in a military organization, where they wont take recruits." He asked me what languages I knew. I told him: "Latvian, German, English." He promised to place me in a prisoner of war camp. He gave a recommendation for me and I passed my medical tests for the KGB or the NKVD. What was the name of that organization back then? They told me: "We don't have anything against you, but there is nobody to vouch for you. We can't hire you." They asked me if I knew Hungarian. But I knew Russian enough that I answered him: "If that is where the capital is Vienna, then I know that language." (It is a word game – in Russian the word "Hungarian" sounds [vengerskii] and Vienna is [ve:na] edit. IL). The person who answered me was very "grammarian". He said to me: "Those who know German don't know this language."

Luba referred me to the hospital for evacuees No.3156, in Kirov. When somebody asked her if she knows anybody educated, she recommended

me. The head of that hospital was a very intelligent man named Nikolai Vasilyevich Krilov. He was deported. In Gorky he was a lead engineer of the alcohol factory. An accident happened there and a man was killed, and he had to admit that he was poisoning people (actually people can get poisoned from alcohol). He, his wife, and son were deported to Kirov. His son was in the army. He felt sorry for me. At the beginning he gave me an accountant job. He had someone from Moscow who was working as a filing clerk and Krilov knew that she would soon return to Moscow. It was probably 1943 when people began to return to Moscow. When she left he gave me her job. He knew I didn't understand and couldn't write in Russian. I copied from other documents and that was enough for me. I worked there until 1945. It was very nice there – it was the hospital for treating the infections. There was a department of venereal and infection diseases. We were receiving 800 grams of bread, but my mother only received 200 grams. At the beginning it was 300 grams, but later it was 200 grams. We had some land. Nikolai Krilov planted some cabbages there for me. He went there every weekend. I couldn't go there because I didn't have any days off. Every day I had to sign in injured patients and fill out forms. They called on nights when people were brought in for surgery.

At the end we all were working at the hospital – Luba, Sonya and my sister in-law as a nurse.

He (Nikolai Krilov – edit.) was a very energetic man; he built fruit storage in the hospital's yard. He was a food engineer. He organized a store for the civil personnel. We didn't have to wait in line during the night for bread. We weren't starving and even got packages. We could exchange the ration cards for food at the hospital. That's how we lived.

When I came to work in a bad mood, he always asked: "Anechka, what is the matter? What do you need? Don't you have firewood?"

I said: "No, I don't." He said, "You know, the carter will go by your house to the meat-packing house, and he'll drop some firewood next to your home."



The water froze in Kirov. He brought us water in the cans. From the farmland, which wasn't accounted for, he gave me some potatoes and cabbages. During some holidays my mother and I would visit him. He had the loveliest wife – Evgeniya Ivanovna. They lived in the hostel in one little room. A misfortune happened – Nikolai Vasilyevich Krilov got sick with pneumonia. For the first time in the hospital, oxford penicillin appeared. I translated the manual. But he was sick up to the very heart. He was not fit for service in the army. They put him in the hospital and where he was overdosed with penicillin. He died in 1945.

I had to do the duties of the superior. I didn't have anybody working under me. The way we were signing the documents was the following: the deputy of the department of politics signed for me. The head of the hospital Solomon Yakovlevich Rozovskiy from Leningrad was a very nice man, very cultural. He was crippled. I think he was a colonel, but because he was crippled, he was unfit for the service. In 1943 on Pesach we invited the chief of the hospital for the first time. He had military food and brought us some meat and we made a Seder. I remember, my friend Luba, who was a very tough girl, went to the bazaar. And she noticed that somebody was selling a big pike fish. They were asking 100 rubles for it. And Luba stretched out and gave those 100 rubles over the heads of the crowd so we could have a fish on Pesach. And then came the chief of the hospital to visit as on Pesach. Boris was sending us matzo and clothing through the Red Cross. I have to say that nobody bothered us for that. I saw that somebody came to check us, probably from the KGB. They were looking at us very closely. That was because our people (from Riga- edit.) said that when they lived in Riga, they had a three-room apartment, and because of that they were put in jail for ten years. But we already knew to keep quiet. My father had such an experience.

When the war was over, Razovkiy nominated our team for awards. He nominated me for the Red Star. In 1945 when the hospital where Luba Mincovskaya worked closed, she took my job and I received a letter which said that they are taking me back to study in the Institute of the Foreign

Languages. In 1945 they let my mother and me evacuate.

In 1989, during Gorbachev's rule, people started going to Israel for visits. One of our relatives went to Israel. All the relatives going there were meeting my brother. And I told them: "Tell my brother that I will visit him, but I don't have any money. Let him send me an invitation." I don't remember when I got the invitation, but one day there was a note from the Post Office that there was an insured letter for me. I ran to the Post Office to get that letter. My brother even opened an account! He was waiting that day since 1926, for 63 years.

My brother was sad that his only sister didn't come, but he never invited me. Never wrote to me. People who came from there sent me greetings from him, but he never said to me: "Take all your family and go there!" Never!

But his wife's family gathered in Israel – her mother came, sister Rosa and the oldest brother from America came, too. They all came to die in Israel.

On Tuesday I stayed in the line to get an application (for a passport). They gave me an application which I had to fill out. On Wednesday I went to get my picture taken. I was already retired back then and I filled out the application myself. It was very interesting. There were questions about all of my family history. On Thursday I again stood in the line to submit the application. When I entered the office, there was a woman in a military uniform. She read the application and said to me: "You haven't seen your brother since 1926 and he is 80 years old! You will get the permit soon for sure! Reserve the ticket! You will receive the passport for sure."

On Friday I stayed in the line for the ticket. On the same day I managed to reserve the ticket for the 5<sup>th</sup> of April. Immediately I called my brother and let him know. For the first time in my life I spoke with my 80 year-old brother. In 1988 I warned him in advance that I would call him. We took a color picture – my husband my grandchildren and me, which I sent him saying that's how we look on his 80th birthday.

I started to prepare (to save money) in advance. My daughter got me a job to translate from Russian into Latvian. They paid me very well for that. I had some money. And he (the owner of the company – edit.) sent someone to me with the money, but that person paid me in rubles instead of dollars. He gave me 2000 rubles. Later I learned that he should have given me \$500. What he gave me was just pennies. But I didn't care.

On March 4<sup>th</sup>, a month I was to leave for Israel, I came home – we were celebrating the 8<sup>th</sup> of March at work. All of the family was there. My daughter was already married at that time and my son was married too. They informed me (by telephone from Israel) that my brother had died!

On April 4<sup>th</sup> I had to fly to Israel. I had the reservation. I had to travel through Cyprus and then back home through Athens. I tried to make reservation in business class, but no seats were available. I didn't care; I just wanted to get there.

I was in no condition to go to Israel in April 1989, but I went anyway. His son Raffi called. The sister of my sister-in-law, her name is Rosa, told me that everything was ready – they reserved a time on TV to show that after so many years a sister meets her brother. But I refused to go. I couldn't go. Then they made a decision – they sent another invitation for my daughter. And I have to thank my daughter's husband, Oleg Mineev – he was a Russian, he had access to secret documents at the Institute of Civil Aviation. His thesis was secret, too. In spite of possible investigation against him, he allowed my daughter to go to Israel with me.

That's how we went. I have to tell one story. We went through Athens, but his son Raffi was the president of the El Al Company of Israel, an international company. He was afraid he wouldn't recognize us. In Athens there was a note, they put us in the hotel. For twenty-four hours we were in Athens, we looked at the city, my daughter saw the Acropolis. Then we went to Tel Aviv. There was one man, an aviator, traveling with us who knew my nephew. My nephew was afraid of one thing – that we wouldn't recognize each other. But I had so many pictures of him; I had no doubts in my mind. We arrived in Israel and there

was my nephew holding that aviator – he came as a guest in that airplane. He was standing with that aviator because he was afraid of missing us. I said to him: "Raffi!" A limo was waiting for us, as it was required for the president of the company. When we went through customs, he was waiting for us on the side. We got our passports and the luggage. He was proudly pushing our luggage and told everybody: "These are my relatives from Riga!"

It was late. From the airport we went straight to the cemetery. Raffi turned the car lights on the grave. That's how I met my brother!

They lived in Ramatasharon. During the war in 1968, my brother wrote me: "I don't know what will happen to our country, but we all have to live in one city." So he left Tel Aviv to go to Ramatasharon. His daughter after getting married also bought an apartment in Ramatasharon. Raffi had a house in Ramatasharon. Raffi was a military general, an aviator.

We arrived, went up to the stairs, and there was my sister-in-law – I didn't recognize her. She had a deformed spine. There was the whole family - Raffi's wife Sarah, then Gilla with her husband. All five weeks and the rest of my life I am asking the same question: "Why wasn't he standing there on the second floor in the hallway to meet us?"

My brother died very suddenly. He woke up at six o'clock, but a half hour later he was gone. Before then he had some strokes. My sister-in-law is dead now, too. She also died suddenly. During the day she was still walking, bought a chicken, and fish for Sabbath. Since I returned from Israel, every Friday I invite my family for Sabbath dinner. In Israel Raffi invited everybody. It is not because I am such a believer; I only want my family to get together. I am lighting candles without the prayer. Preparing the dinner. Everybody who is available comes, or else calls to excuse themselves.

Sonya felt sick, she called her son and daughter, opened her door and fell on the bed and died. Before then she managed to meet her twin granddaughters. It was in 1993. She came to her fa-



therland with a humpback. Raffi was the president and was carrying her on his arms in the airplane. Same here. She had a car here and place in the Hotel Riga. She came here for one week and stayed for another one. That year my two granddaughters were in Jewish summer camp in Melluzi and her granddaughters were also there teaching, but every evening they traveled home. Every day for two weeks I ran to the Hotel Riga, and we spent all day together.

Now about my sister Gita. She graduated from the German gymnasium in Jelgava. It was a private school, very expensive. As my brother Boris used to say, gymnasium was horribly anti-Semitic. There was no Jewish high school there, but nobody considered going to a Latvian school. When I was writing to Boris something about Jelgava, he answered to me: "I only remember that anti-Semitic school!" She was studying to become a pharmacist and on June 4th, 1933 she married Moric Rozenberg. He was 18 years older and she was very beautiful. She was working in the pharmacy and she looked younger than her age. People were coming and saying: "I don't want this girl making my medicine!" It was very hard. Moric Rozenberg was single, rich, not so young anymore. I wouldn't say he was super rich. But he had a 4-room apartment in Jelgava and furnished it through a catalog. Immediately hired a maid. They had a big and beautiful wedding. On March 17<sup>th</sup> 1934 she gave birth to a daughter whom they named Atida. They lived nicely. She didn't work anymore. There was a Jewish company and they played cards. She was allowed to lose any amount of money and he paid everything. But when she won something, she bought something for me – fabric for a dress or coat. Her husband loved me very much. When she got married I graduated 7<sup>th</sup> grade.

During summers they spent some time at the beach outside Riga. When Atida was a year and a half, they returned from the beach because the girl suddenly got sick. Her temperature was very high and it was impossible to tell what was wrong with her. She had palsy. Some professor from Riga gave the diagnoses. At the beginning she was completely paralyzed, but slowly it got better. One leg, one nerve was dead. And she became an invalid. They were trying to cure her at

different places – Kemeru, Tartu, Vienna, Tatri. Nothing could help her. She was limping and didn't attend school.

At that time I had high temperature, too, and everybody was afraid I would get sick, too. I remember my brother-in-law was very religious. One Friday there was a list made to bring the money to the poor. My friend Luba and I were delivering the money. And when they asked: "Where is this money from?" we had to answer: "Pray for the health of the child."

On March 17th, 1941, when she was seven, we came to her birthday (on June 17<sup>th</sup> 1941 Latvia entered the USSR – edit.), they already took his business away and he was working as grain distributor. He had a license to sell abroad. During K. Ulmanis times (the last president of independent Latvia during 20's and 30's, in 1934 after overturning the government he became the president – edit.) they didn't want to give licenses to Jews. But there was one Jew who did everything for Jews.

(To be continued)

## **An Interview with Simon Gutman Part 1**

Recorded 7 February 2002

Interviewed by Ayna Antane

Translated from Russian to English by Sofia Kagna

Do you know how old am I now? The police record requires a year of your birth, but for common people we only have to know how old you are. In September [2001] I turned 94. But inside I feel very young. I am an artist, my specialty is cartoons. I am also a humorist and I am an actor too. My father's last name was Gutnoman-Gutman. It was only in Soviet times that we simplified it. Gutnoman was thrown off. My father's full name was Israel Solomonovich [Gutnoman-Gutman]. He was born in 1873 and passed away in 1919 in Kharkov (*Ukraine's second largest city, located in the East of Ukraine on the border with Russia, was one of the big industrial centers in the 20<sup>th</sup> century*). He was on his way to us. My life story is very complex, rich and multifaceted.

What did my grandfathers and grandmothers do? I do not know a lot about them. They were en-

gaged in commerce. They traded in wood and lumber. They did it mostly in Latgalia (*eastern part of Latvia*). I can tell about my father that he was really good in commerce, but he was not so good in politics. He used to sell wool: he had an expeditionary firm. I remember how policemen came to us after my father took some immigrants across the border. The policemen kept coming to our house after that. After that my father started his own cinema. It was in Dvinsk (*now – Daugapils, the second biggest city of Latvia, the center of Latgalia region*).

The name of the cinema was “Grand Electro.” He bought a screen and all the necessary equipment in Germany. This is what I remember very well. And when the battlefield during World War I was near Dvinsk – father was in Dvinsk all this time – the profit from the cinema was not bad because of its closeness to the front zone and a big garrison was located there. Nobody could take this town for three long years. Only in 1917, when the [*Russian*] army was demoralized and fell apart, only then the town was taken [*by German Army*]. It was then that my father started to suffer from heart disease. As a child I remember that he always seemed old to me. In fact he died at the age of 46. He died on his way to us. He sent our family – my mother, my two brothers and me – to Zilupe, which was called Razumovskoye before (*this is probably a mistake in pronunciation: it was Rozeno or Rozena (named after Baron Rozen), then in 1920 was changed to Zilupe*). And later we lived near Moscow, in the city named Pavlovskiy Posad. There I attended school. There were three brothers: Yakov, who was the eldest, my twin-brother Solomon (Salya) and I. Actually Solomon was born 20 minutes before me. I was very small – not bigger than a scoop. Yakov was two years older than we; he was born in 1905. In Dvinsk we had a governess.

The name of my elder sister was Nyuta. She was born in 1903. Anna Israelevna was her full name. She had a problem with her leg. Mother took her to Berlin for medical treatment. Just before the beginning of the war [World War I] Mother took her to Switzerland. And Nyuta lived there; she was only 11 years old at that time. She was completely cut off from us for several years. There she learned to speak German and French. Father

was sending money to her. But when it became completely impossible to send something there, she worked in the mountains near Lozano helping in mountain sanatoriums. She was doing her best trying to continue her living in a sanatorium there. She returned to Riga, to our uncle’s place, via Finland in 1921. We met her only in 1923.

In Dvinsk, before we were evacuated, we lived at 20 Rizhskaya Street. Once, when our mother was seeing her sister Tirtsa off to Vilnius, she took Salya and me to the train station. They were standing right next to the railway car and their conversation made our mother and her sister temporarily forget about us and we did not know what to do. We were only 6 years old at the time. Salya was more energetic and spirited than I. He said, “Let’s go!” We asked a cabby, “Hey, have you seen our mother?” “What does she look like?” “She is tall and beautiful” “No, I have not seen her” “Take us home then!” We told him our home address, 20 Rizhskaya Street that was just ahead, right near the train station, and it was so close that you could walk! For us it was too far to walk but a very short ride. Can you imagine our mother turning around and both of us were gone! She cried and she was scared to death.

Father was usually wearing a pince-nez [rimless glasses], smoking Zephyr cigarettes, and before dinner he always knocked down a shot of liquor.

When mother took Nyuta to Switzerland, mother’s half-sister, aunt Roza Israeltan, lived with us. We were very well behaved children. Before we went to bed we always came to say good-night to our mother and kissed her hand. Aunt Roza stayed with father during the war. But in the 1920s she immigrated to America.

Father was not a very religious person, but it was common to go to synagogue. He visited synagogue when he sometimes went to Berdyansk (*a port in the south central part of Ukraine on the Azov Sea, it was one of the biggest Jewish commercial and religious centers before World War II*), where there was a choral synagogue. He went there. He had a special silk shawl [tallit]. I remember that in synagogue our father was pointing at us and saying in Yiddish, “They will be the performers of my remembrance prayer

(Kiddush).”

Our father had a sister. I was a cute kid. Women and girls kissed me, but I did not like it when old women kissed me. His sister Lay-Roza used to live in Balvi (*a small town in the eastern part of Latvia in the Latgalia region*), after that she lived in Pytalovo (*Пыталово in Russian; Abrene is the Latvian name of the town located in Pskov region of Russia. According to the Latvian-Soviet Peace Treaty of 1920 in Riga a part of Ostrov uyezd that included Pytalovo was given to Latvia and at that time the name of the town became Jaunlatgale. In 1938 the town's official name was changed to Abrene. Later after the World War II the government of the Soviet Union made the decision to pass Abrene from the Latvian Republic to the Russian SFSR and the town's name was again changed back to Pytalovo. It presently remains a highly disputed matter between Latvia and Russia*). They all were in some kind of trade or commerce. She had brothers who lived somewhere in Latgalia but we never met them.

My mother's name was Berta Borisovna. Aronovich was her maiden name. Her mother, my grandmother Sheina [Aronovich], was married three times. All her husbands passed away one after the other. My mother was her only child from her first marriage, but from her second husband there were many children – my mother's half-brothers and sisters. With her last husband she lived in Copenhagen, Denmark. Later she returned to her daughter from her second husband, my aunt Tirtsa Koldobskaya, her daughter from the second marriage who lived in Vilnius. There she remained and there she passed away. Auntie Tirtsa's husband was a wealthy merchant. My grandmother died, I remember, in the summer of 1931. My mother went to Vilnius to attend her funeral. And Aunt Tirtsa also passed away in Vilno (*Vilno or Vilna is an old Russian name of Vilnius*) in 1936 before the war.

In Dvinsk my mother and my grandmother lived in Griva (*Griva is one of Dvinsk's four districts. It is located on the left bank of Dvina River*). It is Kurlyandiya. (*Located on the south side of Western Dvina River (Daugava in Latvian), Courland or Kurland has Baltic seacoast as its other border. Historically Kurland was under the rule of German princes and was a part of the German Holy Roman Empire. It was absorbed by Russia in 18<sup>th</sup> century and traditionally had a large German population and German influence*).

There was a big influence of German language. They were not rich. And my mother had to read books under the blanket. Her family was not happy about that because she wasted kerosene and candles. My father was much older than my mother. I do not remember how much older exactly. Reportedly mother did not have very a romantic feelings towards my father. He bought her a carriage and a horse and used to take her for a ride. I have learned that from my sister. Mother was closer with her than with us.

We spoke only Russian at home. However, mother spoke very good Yiddish. Because my mother was planning to go to my sister, she went to study French in special classes. Apparently nothing came of that because she had the three of us.

I had a rich life; I met a lot of famous people. In 1917 my father took us from Pavlovskiy Posad to the sea resort in Berdyansk. We were supposed to spend only six weeks there, but it turned out that we were stranded there for four years. During the Civil War (*After October Revolution in 1917 the multi-sided conflict emerged on the territory of the former Russian Empire. The Civil War lasted until 1922, and in some places until 1923*) we lived in Berdyansk on Azov Sea. I have seen Whites and Reds. (*The White movement mainly consisted of supporters of Russia's Tsarist regime or later Temporary Government and strongly opposed Bolsheviks who called themselves "Reds." The military units of the White movement were mostly led by the military officers of the former Russian Empire and were called the White Army or White Guard.*). Whites offered our mother a chance to go overseas to France and Switzerland to see her daughter.

Russia was in turmoil and my father stayed in Dvinsk. In 1919 he was trying to get to us by the train that carried Austrian captive soldiers. The train was heading south. They took all his money and documents from him. He was unable to do anything because they would throw him right off the train while it was moving. Father was already ill, he had severe heartaches and was shivering with pain. It was impossible for him to travel and every time he tried he returned to Dvinsk. When he was traveling to us that last time, he made a stop in Kharkov. There he stayed at the home of my mother's cousin. He was placed in a hospital

and there he passed away. Now it is called heart infarction. Mother buried him in Kharkov. They called her and she traveled from Berdyansk to Kharkov for his funeral. It was very complicated to get there.

Our life was hard – we sold my mother’s sealskin fur coat and were eating from the proceeds all winter.

In Pavlovskiy Posad we studied at the Realschule (*a non-classical secondary school*), and in Berdyansk we studied at gymnasia (*secondary upper preparatory school in Russian Empire before the Revolution of 1917*), where our uniform was different. In gymnasia they prepared students to enter university to become lawyers and medical doctors. Realschule was preparing engineers. In the four years that we spent in Berdyansk I have seen everything in this world: Civil War, troop landings, Father Makhno (*Nestor Ivanovich Makhno (1888 – 1934) also called “Bat’ka Makhno” (father Makhno) was a head of a huge anarcho-communist movement in rural Ukraine during the Civil War. For a short time he formed an Anarchist Republic with the capital in Gulyay Polye (a small town in now Zaporizhsky and then Yekaterinoslavsky region). Being a son of local peasants he advocated the rights of common people and refused any authority, be it Reds, Whites, Ukrainian Directory, or the church*) and air bombings. If I tell you about everything that happened at that time, you can possibly make a whole movie about it. My older brother was ill, he had some nervous problems. In 1921 my mother pressed the Soviet authority and we got a free voucher to a sanatorium, a voucher for the whole family. Can you imagine, there was incredible poverty everywhere and there we were getting this voucher! We all got ready for the journey and made some croutons for the road. This journey from Berdyansk to Moscow – it was a real epic; there were too many events and details! On railway stations there were hungry people from Povolzhye (*Povolzhye is a Russian region that consists of the territories along the banks of the Volga River. The Povolzhye famine (1921-22) killed about 5 million people in Russia and Ukraine*). We saw the dead bodies of small children! We were robbed; everything we had was stolen from us! When we finally arrived in Moscow we were all sick with measles. This illness resulted in psychological problems for my older brother; and

mother put him in the hospital where he died in 1922.

There were only three of us who returned to Riga in 1923: my mother, my brother and I. First we came to Riga where my uncle helped us out and later we moved to Dvinsk because we hoped that our movie theatre still remained there. However, other people already occupied that building. My mother was trying to earn some money just to get by. It was hard for us and my mother borrowed money from several people. Fortunately the City Council was paying rent at the place where we lived.

In the house where we used to live in Berdyansk we had many very interesting visitors. The second studio of MHAT was on tour. (*Moscow Art Academic Theatre is a world-famous theatre company founded in Moscow in 1897 by theatrical directors Constantin Stanislavsky and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko. Their vision created a renowned Stanislavsky method of acting: a realistic approach that forced actors to “put on the skin” of their personages and “live and breath” their thoughts and lives during the time of the performance. The method was contrary to the popular melodramatic approach of expression of feelings that dominated Russian theatre at the time*) The well-known actors and celebrities lived in our house – Stanitsyn (*Victor Yakovlevich Stanitsyn (real name Geze) (1897—1976) famous Soviet theatre and movie actor. He was famous internationally for the role of Count Ilya Rostov in the movie “War and Peace.” He was one of the leading teachers at the MHAT Actor’s School-Studio*) slept in the next room and also Khmelev (*Nikolay Pavlovich Khmelev (1901-1945) – famous Russian actor and director*). They were the cream of the crop of Russian theatre. We have never been at the theatrical performance before and they took us there. It made an enormous impression on us!

The national autonomy in democratic Latvia was very accepting and permissible to other cultures. There were three types of Jewish schools: Yiddish, Hebrew, and Russian. We studied in Russian Jewish secondary school. Obviously it was necessary to pay for school. At school my brother and I had close ties with the Komsomol movement (*Komsomol is an abbreviation from the Russian “Kommunisticheskiy Soyuz Molodiozhi”, or “Communist Union of Youth”. The organization was founded in 1918. It played a role of a youth arm of the*

*Communist Party*). Latgalia was under a very strong influence of Komsomol. Komsomol was an underground organization. Only regular youth clubs were legal, and we also went there. I was not the most active fighter, however I was put behind bars a couple of times. In 1929 I was in the Central prison solitary confinement isolation cell for one month. I also was in Daugavpils (Dvinsk) prison for a little while. I was renting a room with a friend to whom I connected through the movement. So when they have arrested the central committee group they also raided other apartments and houses and I was tied to this case. I was released before the trial under the police supervision. Eventually I was acquitted. My brother was also an active member of the Komsomol organization. When we lived in Berdyansk my family supported the White movement, because environment there was very bourgeois: small shopkeepers and small business-owners. However when we returned to Pavlovskiy Posad and lived there from 1921 to 1923, at that time under the influence of my friends I became Red.

(to be continued)

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