

THE IVANSK PROJECT e-NEWSLETTER

Issue Number 2

January - February 2004

This edition of the e-Newsletter was prepared during Chanukah: may the festival lights continue to shine for you, your family and humankind throughout the coming year. And may 2004 bring peace to our troubled world.

CONTENTS (This issue of the Newsletter was revised in August, 2007)

- ***Pinkas HaKehillot of Iwaniska:***

There are only a few references dealing with the history of Jewish life in Polish town of Iwaniska (Ivansk). Perhaps the most detailed is the description given in *The Pinkas HaKehillot* (Encyclopedia of Jewish Communities, Poland), which is published in Hebrew by Yad Vashem. Members of our Action Committee translated the record relating to Iwaniska into English. The text is invaluable, but the amount of information on the social, cultural, economic and spiritual world of our ancestors is minimal.

The paragraphs are numbered to serve as reference points for discussion in the *Commentary* that follows the document.

- ***Poems by Ettie Taichman:***

In two poems (“*Warsaw to Lodz by Bus*” and “*Lodz*”) Ettie conveys the emotional impact of her journey to Poland to locate her father’s boyhood home. Her feelings are probably shared by many other Jews searching for their roots in a land scarred by the Holocaust.

- ***Mi Vida (My Life) by David Lederman:***

David Lederman’s odyssey begins in Ivansk and then shifts to Austria, Colombia and Israel. It is a story of courage, determination and resilience. And most of all, it is a life well lived, brimming with hope for the future.

Iwaniska

adapted from

Pinkas HaKehillot, Polen, Volume VII
(Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1999)
pages 70-72

Non-literal translation from the Hebrew by
Sydney Kasten, David Lederman and Arthur E. Zimmerman

Iwaniska

Opatow District; Kielce Province

YEAR	GENERAL POPULATION	NUMBER OF JEWS *
1662	416	?
1674	311	?
1764	?	284
1822	1081	294
1857	1312	596
1921	2803	1518
* Not including children less than 1 year old		

1. Iwaniska was originally called Umishov, but at an unspecified date its name was changed to Iwaniska. By 1400 a tailor's guild was operating in the town and in 1403 Iwaniska was "incorporated" and granted the right to call itself a town. During the 16th century Iwaniska was one of the Calvinist centers in Poland, and from time to time religious assemblies were held there.

2. A principal road connecting Warsaw with Krakow passed through Opatow, which was readily accessible to nearby Iwaniska. Owing to its prime position and easy access, Iwaniska developed rapidly, and soon became an important trade centre for the area. Thirteen annual fairs or markets took place in the town and many merchants and tradesmen conducted business in Iwaniska. In 1578 there were 15 clerks in the service of the local nobility, 19 distillers and 44 artisans in Iwaniska, many of whom specialized in metal work with silver, gold and brass.

- 3.** The period of prosperity ended in 1656, presumably a consequence of the Swedish invasion of the area in 1655. A great part of the town was destroyed and only 50 houses remained standing. During the 18th century, Iwaniska was rebuilt. There were 158 houses in the town by 1778 and 167 houses by 1869.
- 4.** We have no documented information on the beginning of Jewish settlement in Iwaniska. The first Jews probably arrived in the 18th century. At that time, the nobleman who owned the town (whose name may have been Zwirowski or Seborovsky) realized that Jews could have a positive influence on Iwaniska's development. He allowed them to purchase lots and to build dwellings in Iwaniska.
- 5.** By the middle of the 19th century the Jewish community was well established and a wooden synagogue was built to serve its needs. Many Jews from neighboring towns came to live in Iwaniska. In 1899 Rabbi Yitzhak David Shapiro became the principal religious leader of Iwaniska. Many Chassidim of different religious persuasions resided in Iwaniska but no shtiblechs were found in the town. The entire community prayed at the only synagogue, and Jewish boys attended a traditional cheder. From 1907-1914 Rav Yaakov presided in Iwaniska. At the end of his tenure, Rav Yechiel Alter Ferleger took his place. In 1924 Rav Yaakov Yitzchak Widman occupied the rabbinic chair until the outbreak of the Second World War.
- 6.** In the spring of 1918 a disastrous fire broke out in Iwaniska destroying most of the wooden structures, including the synagogue.
- 7.** Between the two World Wars (1918-1939) the Jews lived in poverty and subsisted mainly as small traders and craftsmen. The town's commercial development was held back because Iwaniska had no direct rail links with other communities. The first bus line serving Iwaniska was introduced in 1929, and trade with Opatow improved to some extent. Jewish artisans formed their own labor union, affiliated with Agudat (Agudas) Israel (an ultra-orthodox political party). A special benevolent fund ("Kupat Gmilot Chassidim") was created to provide interest-free loans to the needy.
- 8.** In general, the Jewish populace supported the Agudat Israel Party, but beginning in the 20th century the influence of the Zionists steadily increased, especially among the younger generations. In 1916 "Hanoar Hatzioni" and "Betar" were the first Zionist groups in Iwaniska.
- 9.** During the interwar period most of the boys attended the traditional cheder, and the girls were enrolled in the Beis Yaakov School, founded in 1927 by the Agudat Israel. In 1930 a Jewish library was opened, where young people could meet for social and cultural activities and enroll in Hebrew classes. Many of the young aspired to a secular education but the ultra-orthodox Chassidim fought tooth and nail against the introduction of non-religious studies as well as Zionist and socialist youth organizations. In fact, those who espoused such developments were accused of being "kofrim" (infidels), traitors to their tradition. The conservative Chassidim denounced these individuals, as well as the more liberal members of their sect to the local authorities.

10. The Germans invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, and a few days later marched into Iwaniska. The Jewish community consisted of approximately 1,663 souls, led by an unpretentious Chassid, who was a tailor by profession and loyal to the local rabbi. Initially, the invaders did not change the leadership of the Jewish community, nor interfere with day-to-day conduct of Jewish life. But the Nazis demanded unconditional obedience to their orders. At this point, the lives of the Jewish population were more or less normal because the town was still governed by the local Polish authorities and Polish police. But even at this time several young Jewish radicals were arrested and deported to distant labor camps and by the end of 1940, young Jews were being imprisoned for not obeying German orders. The noose was slowly tightening, yet in some instances it was still possible for Jews to carry on protecting themselves in the old way, offering bribes to free prisoners or to lessen the severity of their punishment.

11. Even during the German occupation the ultra-orthodox Chassidim continued their unrelenting battle against those who did not accept their conservative precepts. They complained to the authorities against those who opposed their teachings, and several young men were arrested for non-compliance with German orders.

12. By the middle of 1941, the situation of the Jews in Iwaniska deteriorated even further. The occupiers imposed crippling taxes on Jewish residents. The heads of the Jewish community asked a group of young Jews to seek help from their Polish neighbors. These young Jews had good relations with some groups of Polish youth and with several municipal employees. T. Goldstein, son of a prominent family, was a good friend of one of the heads of the local Polish police, a man named Beks. Beks was also a member the Polish resistance movement, "Armia Krajowa" ("AK"; the Home Army), and he helped by informing Goldstein of German plans against the Jewish population. Also the mayor, Mirovsky, provided Jews with vital information and useful advice. Both Beks and Mirovsky alerted Goldstein that the Nazis were about to institute a boycott of all Jewish trade and urged the community to spirit away and hide all of its mobile assets and properties.

13. But there were many anti-Semitic Poles in Iwansika. One was Segeldovsky who had been an officer in the Polish army and was now one of the leaders of the AK. He tried to persuade the local priest to support his anti-Semitic position and also urged the Germans to boycott Jewish trade and to confiscate their property for distribution to the Polish population. When Segeldovsky realized that the priest and many Poles were not hostile toward the Jews, he and his supporters set fire to several Jewish homes. Then, he presented the Germans with a list of ten Jews who he claimed were responsible for the act. At the head of the list was the name of T. Goldstein. Even though it must have been perfectly clear that neither Goldstein nor any of the other accused had any reason for starting the blaze, the Germans condemned these Jews to death. Beks, Mirovsky and the local priest pleaded with the Germans not to carry out the executions but succeeded only in rescuing Goldstein at the last moment. After this episode, Goldstein was named head of the Judenrat in Iwaniska.

14. By the middle of 1941, the Germans began imposing new, oppressive laws upon the Jews in Iwaniska and elsewhere in occupied Poland. All Jews were now obliged to wear

armbands displaying the Star of David. Jews were not permitted to walk on the sidewalks. All trade with non-Jews was forbidden, and other indignities and stringencies were decreed causing great hunger and hardship.

15. A young Rabbi, Y. Rabinovitz, who was related to the Admor Mardomsek, became part of the internal opposition against the ultra-orthodox Chassidim. Rav Rabinovitz was very active in the Jewish community and he supported the Zionist movement. Rav Rabinovitz opened a soup kitchen, and with Goldstein's help, he created a social welfare organization to assist the needy. On March 27, 1941, a contingent of Viennese Jews arrived in Iwaniska. They had been deprived of the most basic necessities and were not adequately dressed for the season. Goldstein and Rabinovitz helped them as much as possible with their limited resources.

16. Towards the end of 1941 members of the German construction company, the "Todt Organization" arrived in Iwaniska and began deporting young, healthy Jews to labor camps. Because survival in such camps was doubtful, Rav Rabinovitz and members of the Zionist pioneer youth groups urged the young men to take to the forest rather than submit to deportation.

17. In 1942 members of the Zionist youth groups set up an underground movement in Iwaniska. They gathered food, purchased arms and made plans to escape in small groups into the surrounding forests where hiding places had been prepared. Rav Rabinovitz and his followers supported their scheme. However, the Chassidim opposed the Jewish underground and acceded to German decrees believing that only a miracle (divine intervention) would save them. In May 1942 the Nazis began deporting Jews from nearby towns to the death camps.

18. In the autumn of 1942 the Jewish leadership learned the date when the Germans planned to deport the Jews from Iwaniska. Rav Rabinowitz ordered his followers and the Zionist pioneers to bury the Torahs, prayer books and other sacred items in the Jewish cemetery. On the day before the deportation all the Jews of Iwaniska participated in the solemn ceremony. At the conclusion Rav Rabinowitz urged everyone to save themselves and their loved ones. Approximately 300 men, women and children began fleeing the town to go into hiding in the forests.

19. On October 15, 1942, the Gestapo and contingents of Ukrainian police surrounded the town and forcibly drove the remaining 1,600 Jews out of their homes into the market square. The Nazis searched every house and shot those who were trying to hide. Under heavy guard the Jews of Iwaniska were transported to the ghetto in Cmielow and together with its Jews were taken to the train station at Ostrowice. There, they were forced into cattle cars and transported to Treblinka for extermination. Only one Ivansker Jew, Israel Seltzer, escaped from Treblinka and lived to tell the story of the murder of his fellow Jews.

20. The Jews who had fled to the forests tried to organize their defenses but communications among the dispersed groups were poor and there was no one to lead them. The Germans carried out manhunts aided by several local farmers. Anyone who

was caught was shot. Rav Rabinovitz was captured and executed in November 1942. Only a few Jews of Iwaniska managed to survive until liberation.

COMMENTARY

by **ARTHUR E. ZIMMERMAN**

(Toronto, Canada)

1. Like many other towns in the medieval world, Omishov/Umishov or Iwaniska was probably on the estate of and owned by a local nobleman; the town provided him and his serfs with a market and with skilled tradesmen. It may be that one of the names, Omishov/Umishov or Iwaniska, made some kind of reference to the nobleman's family. My father, who was born in Toronto, always thought that Ivansk meant "Little Ivan", but I don't know whether that interpretation has any sort of validity. I don't think that he even knew the proper Polish name of the town.

I don't understand why it is significant to point out that there were tailors in Iwaniska, unless the implication is that they were Jewish tailors. But I would hardly think so since Jews apparently did not settle in Ivansk until the 18th century.

2. In medieval times a principal road connected Warsaw with Krakow and passed through Opatow. Opatow was only 8-10 km from Iwaniska and was easily reached by a road connecting both towns. This provided Iwanska with ready access to a major trade route and as a consequence, Iwaniska developed rapidly.

4. We have yet to verify the identity of the nobleman who was responsible for encouraging Jews to settle in Iwaniska. The Pinchas HaKehillot suggests that he was Zwirowski or Seborovsky, but thus far we have not been able to confirm this in any other reference. On the road to Klimontow (a town southeast of Ivansk) there's the ruin of a large castle (Krzyztopor Castle; in Polish, Krzyztopor means Crossaxe) about 4-6 km from Iwanska. The castle may have belonged to one of the line of noblemen who owned Iwaniska. The fortress was built in the 16th-17th centuries by Krzysztof Ossolinski, the Sandomierz Voivode (baron), but the names of Zwirowski or Seborovsky are not mentioned in the Polish web site which describes some of the castle's history. [see: <http://www.iwaniska.home.pl/zamek.en.html>].

5. Dr. Norton Taichman has done some research that throws needed light upon the way our immediate ancestors were schooled in the Polish shtetlach. Before WW I, few Jewish children attended secular schools, because of community and parental fears that the children would be turned away from their religion. From the 16th century, however, education for Jewish boys was compulsory, enforced by the Kahal and given by religious teachers. Instruction was in Yiddish and was probably largely religious, though there may have been a smattering of other subjects. Education for girls was not compulsory, and

many girls probably stayed at home to learn home-making and to take care of the younger children.

In February 1919, the newly independent Poland introduced compulsory elementary education for all children 7 to 14, and also guaranteed minorities the right to teach their faiths in their own private schools. Therefore, the percentage of Jewish children in Polish public schools began to shift until, in 1934-35, approximately 70% of Jewish children attended the public schools, probably in the mornings, as well as the private cheders (usually in the teachers' homes) in the afternoons. There were also government-accredited Orthodox day schools, where the community could afford it, but they had to include secular subjects.

Therefore, it is likely that boys of my paternal grandfather's generation, born circa 1881, had only a cheder education, in Yiddish and Hebrew. They were not instructed in Polish. My paternal grandmother, raised in Staszow, had no formal education at all. The children of the next generation, in America, were taught in after-school cheders in what was likely the old country way, by an old man wielding a stout stick. They learned to daven at warp speed, but their education in the foundations of the religion, as such, was likely rudimentary.

We have oral testimony that in the 1920-1930s, boys and girls attended a secular school in Iwaniska, together with Polish children. In that period, Jewish girls also received religious education in the Beis Yaakov School (see Paragraph #9).

6. In the spring of 1918, a great fire destroyed Iwaniska's wooden synagogue and almost all its wooden houses. We are not told what caused the fire. The shul was rebuilt, and recollections of emigrants who left Iwaniska at an early age (circa 1920-30s) are that the new synagogue was made of stone. For all that these children knew, it could have been built of wood overlaid with a thick coating of stucco. Are there any drawings or photographs of the Iwaniska shul?

We have oral testimony, not from any personal experience but from family memory, that there was an earlier disastrous fire in Iwaniska, sometime around 1892-95. The conflagration destroyed much of the town, including the synagogue. I suppose there was little or no mechanized firefighting equipment in the town before WW I, and bucket brigades might have been mobilized to bring water from the town's wells and the stream to fight the fire.

7. During the early 20th century Iwaniska had no rail connections with neighboring communities and this greatly impeded its commercial development. The horse and wagon, driven by a *balegolah* (wagon master; teamster), was used to transport freight and people who could afford the "taxi" fare from town to town. Other modes of inter- and intra-town travel were by foot, by horseback or by bicycle (which made its appearance in the late 19th century). During WW I the Austrian army built an extremely narrow gauge rail line (30 inches!) from Iwaniska to Bogoria where the line connected to a more extensive rail system. A bus service to Iwaniska was inaugurated in the late 1920s. These developments in transportation improved trade to some extent, but in the main the Jews of Iwaniska lived on the edge of poverty during the interwar years.

9. Did the youth aspire to acquire a secular and/or higher education? It's not clear in the earlier text whether the cheder offered anything more than a limited spectrum of religious subjects or whether it tried to encourage students to further their studies in yeshiva. While the town's secular school provided foundations in math, grammar, science and Polish, we have no evidence that any children educated in Iwaniska went on to study at a gymnasium, a technical high school or a university. Perhaps we shall be able to obtain more information in this area as The Ivansk Project continues.

We are not told which authorities the Chassidim used to denounce those who opposed them, whether the town council, the police, or the Russian military. It seems to me that the Chassidic "innocents" played right into the hands of the anti-Semites, the way they did later on with the Nazis. Chilling! What sort of punishment did the Chassidim expect these "authorities" to mete out to the liberals? How did the Jewish population react to this betrayal?

Even during the German occupation (Paragraph #11), the Chassidim continued their unrelenting battle against the "kofrim", turning against their own people who did not accept their ultra-conservative precepts for thinking and living. Religious fanaticism, resulting in the ostracism of infidels, took no holiday even in the face of unparalleled persecution and brutality from external sources. The community should have banded together to resist the Nazis, but it did not.

10. What was the name of the "unpretentious" Chassid who led the Jewish community during the Nazis occupation? And who was the unnamed rabbi to whom he was loyal?

Soon after conquering Poland, the Nazis began arresting and deporting "young Jewish radicals" to labor camps. But this is not the whole story: Many healthy young men and women were also seized for no apparent reason and shipped off to hard labor. In some instances this press-ganging saved their lives because they were not living in Ivansk when the town was liquidated in October 1942.

13. Does anyone know the names of these nine individuals, falsely accused of setting fires and condemned to death by the Nazis? Only Goldstein was spared and he apparently became head of the Judenrat afterward. Was his appointment advanced and supported by the Jews or did the Nazis impose this onerous responsibility on him? Goldstein was in a horrible position, forced to "collaborate" with the Nazis in carrying out their decrees, such as selecting victims for hard labour.

The Armia Krajowa (AK, Home Army) was a Polish underground organization that fought the Nazis. While it could not stop the massacre of the Jews, there is considerable controversy whether the AK did enough to help Jews. In fact, some AK units probably had a hand in actions against the Jews. This issue is more fully explored by Y. Gutman and S. Krakowski ("Unequal Victims. Poles and Jews During World War II". Holocaust Library. New York. 1986).

14. In 1941, the Nazis enacted numerous decrees to humiliate, isolate and impoverish the Jews. A few of these probably had little overt effect on Ivansker Jews: for instance, we are told that Jews were not allowed to walk on the sidewalks. But there were no sidewalks in Ivansk at this time.

15. Can anyone provide more information on Rabbi Rabinovitz? He became a very responsible and influential leader of the Jewish community. How did this come about? Did he perhaps succeed Rabbi Yaakov Itzhak Widman circa 1940? Later, in the autumn of 1942, it was Rabbi Rabinovitz who organized the burial of the town's sacred objects in the cemetery. Does this suggest that he was by then the Rabbi of the town? It would be fascinating to know more about how Rabbi Rabinovitz and T. Goldstein who worked together to help the beleaguered Jews of Ivansk. What role, if any, did the Judenrat play in organizing and/or supporting the soup kitchen? How many Viennese Jews arrived in Ivansk during the winter of 1941 and what specific efforts were undertaken on their behalf by Rabinovitz and Goldstein?

16. Young, healthy Jews were deported to several forced labor camps including those located at Skarzysko Kamienna (Hasag munitions), Starachowitz, Sandomierz, Radom, Pianek, Kielce, Blizshin, Czestochov, Ostrowiec and Lizeum.

17. Rabbi Rabinovitz encouraged Jews to take measures to escape from Ivansk, but once again the self-destructive behavior of the Chassidim comes to light. Instead of counseling resistance or escape, the Chassidim urged Jews to submit to extermination, a fate that was by this time known to await everyone, in case a miracle might save them.

18. An eyewitness account of "The Funeral" of the town's sacred treasures will be presented in the next issue of the e-Newsletter.

Perhaps it should be part of our project to try to assemble a biography of the young Rabbi Rabinowitz. In my mind he is one of the heroes of the Holocaust in Iwaniska. Can we find out where he came from and anything about his ancestry, his parents and family, his upbringing, etc?

We are told that approximately 300 Jews fled Ivansk to hide in bunkers in the neighboring forests, but they were recaptured and killed. In this context, Gutman and Krakowski (reference above) state that local villagers took part in raids against Jewish fugitives' bunkers. The villagers would have had an intimate knowledge of the surrounding forests and probably knew where many of the Jews were hiding because some of them may have helped to build the bunkers. The raids were organized by the Nazis or were carried out by peasants on their own initiative (pp 208). Gutman and Kakowski point out that peasants from Iwaniksa "*were being rewarded for their participation in the raids with a bag of sugar and one liter of refined alcohol. Later, however, it was the clothes of the captured Jews which became the sole reward*" (pp 210).

Another part of the Ivansk Project should be to assemble a Yiskor Book for Iwaniska, to include all the names of the Jewish townspeople murdered by the Nazis, with photographs where possible.

Ivansk had two Jewish cemeteries. We have not yet been able to locate the "old" cemetery that was presumably abandoned because it no longer could accommodate the town's needs. Based on personal testimony we have learned that the "new" cemetery was entered via a locked, wooden gate and was bounded on 3 sides by a red brick wall about 4 feet high. Children could climb over the wall. As Norton Taichman's photos indicate (see previous edition of the e-Newsletter) the "new" cemetery has been completely destroyed. Nothing remains of its monuments, wall or gate. In fact, some locals have been digging in the "feld" searching for Jewish gold. Perhaps we should think about trying to erect a memorial at the site and undertake a concerted search to recover the missing monuments that may have been used as construction materials, in barn floors or country roads. Such efforts are expensive but have been successfully carried out with the cooperation of the inhabitants of several other shtetls, including neighboring Staszow. In this context, Jack Goldfarb has devoted himself to preserving the memory of the Jewish history in Staszow [see: < <http://www.thejewishweek.com/news/newscontent.php3?artid=3D7925> >]. Betty Provizer Starkman, a member of our Action Committee, has been instrumental in cemetery restoration and has written a moving account of her visit to Ilza (Drilfish) the home of her paternal ancestors [see: The Kilece-Radom Special Interest Group Journal, Vol. 7, No. 2, 2003. pp.36-37]. And David Lederman has participated in the restoration of the cemetery in Losice, the home of his wife's parents (see *Mi Vida*, below)

19. Does anyone know anything about Israel Seltzer, the lone survivor of the deportation of Ivanskers to Treblinka? Did he survive the war? Was his testimony recorded and can it be retrieved?

To conclude: the Pinkas Hakehillot provides only a glimpse of the history of Jewish Life in Iwaniska. We come away with a feeling of emptiness when we realize that 400 years of our past have been compressed into only 2 pages. And most of the story suggests the bleakest impressions of the lives of our ancestors. Surely, they had happy times and many occasions for celebration. With your help we can fill in many of the gaps in our past. If you can provide additional insights into the material presented in the Pinkas Hakehillot, please get in touch with us!

POEMS

by **Ettie Taichman**

New York, NY USA

[Ed Note: *Ettie Taichman became an honorary Ivansker when she married my brother, Lorne (Lazer). Ettie is interested in Eastern European Jewish History, especially in Poland. Her father, Morris J, Granite (Granatstein) was born in 1911 and raised in Lodz. When he was 15 years old, he immigrated to Toronto. He was a prolific writer and poet, and some of his early work focused on his boyhood memories of Lodz. In the summer of 2000, Ettie and her daughter, Rebecca, spent 5 days in Lodz tracking down the structures described in her father's epic work, "My City Lodz". Using the maps he drew and telephoning him in Toronto for details, they located the house where he was raised, the family balcony used as a sukkah, the shul, the school, his aunt's apartment corner, the park - all of which remain, though more than a little worn and dusty. In her poem, "Lodz", Ettie tells us that the absence of any trace of Jewish life in Lodz was particularly poignant perhaps precisely because the physical world of her father's boyhood was still largely intact.*

On the same trip, Ettie visited Ivansk, first with Rebecca and then with my wife Louise and me. I wished I could identify structures in Ivansk that could be linked to my family, but that seems like a remote prospect.]

Warsaw to Lodz by Bus

The war is long over
but I, a student of the death camps,
I'm hunkered down in my seat
half-expecting they'll come for us
even though nothing is happening,
just a Polish bus cruising past
green wheat fields.

As for the landscape,
something is blocking my view.
I'm not saying I can't see anything.
It's that the darkness of the past
has dimmed the horizon
and though I crane my neck
to search the sky,
I can't seem to find the morning sun.

And on my right
reclines a stout woman of advanced age,
her face collapsed in sleep,
her yellow hair bobbing gently
to the rhythm of the bus.
Who are you, woman,
with your jaw dropped so wide?
Can you tell me what you did then?

And on my left
slumps my American daughter, Rebecca,
one long leg draped over the armrest,
skinny fingers never still.
Rebecca with the wild red hair,
the Jewish eyes, the soft face.
I am so startled to see her
in this grim place.

Lodz

We came a long way for this
to dark, grisly Poland
where all that's terrible
has already happened,
where my daughter, Rebecca, and I
tread weakly
not knowing what to say,
as we move silently
through the crumbling grey streets

of my father's city, Lodz.
And in the dusty courtyard
of his childhood,
we stretch our ears
listening for Jewish voices,
but nothing familiar is hanging
in the heavy summer air.
Nothing.
Just shutters creaking closed
and scornful faces turning away.

MI VIDA (My Life)

by **David Lederman** Bat Yam, Israel

1 December 2003.

Where shall I start? At the beginning or at the end?

In a few weeks I shall be 79 years old and do not know how I arrived at this age so soon. There was no warning. And here I am trying to remember what happened to me, to my family, to the entire world during that time.

I was born on the 19th of December 1924 in Vienna, the capital of what was then the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. Before the Anschluss, Vienna was a beautiful, cosmopolitan city suffused with culture, art and music. For most of the first decade of my life, my family felt privileged to live there. But this quiet epoch was an illusion, the calm before the tempest that was unleashed in 1933.

About 14 years ago I decided to find out as much as possible about my ancestors. Thanks to the instruction given to me by my dear friend, Chaim Broschi, an engineer, I learned the elementary principles of computers. I bought one and started to write my autobiography in Spanish, the language I have used since I was 10 years old. The title of my story was "Mi Mundo" (My World). In 1993 I realized that there were many elements I had not recorded in my diary, including the names of my ancestors; so I decided to start building my family tree. Step by step I got information about my family. It was not an easy task. Thanks to the arrival of the Internet, everything became much more accessible. I could get in touch with the whole world in real time and readily gathered information from relatives living in South America (mainly in Colombia), United States and Canada. I also secured some documents of my ancestors (birth certificates, wedding certificates) from the Polish Archives in Warsaw. When I had sufficient data I sent a copy of my family tree to The Douglas E. Goodman Jewish Genealogical Center at Beth Hatefusoith (Museum of the Diaspora) in Tel Aviv and to the JewishGen web site in the USA. Now the information was available in cyberspace to anyone who was interested in learning more about my family. Soon, I received many inquiries from people I had never met before and discovered several new relatives. My family tree sprouted very rapidly. Now I can trace my ancestors back to the beginning of the 18th century. Many generations of my family lived in Ivansk but I shall restrict my story primarily to the period covering the last 100 years.

If you'd like to view the Lederman Family Home Page, log on to:
< www.lederman.info >

Both my parents were born in what was called the "Kingdom of Poland". My father Moszek (Moshe) Lederman was born in the little town of Ivansk, in the district of Opatow (Apt) in the Radom Gubernia, on 13 January 1900, just a few days after the beginning of the 20th Century. He was one of 12 siblings. His father was Maier Wolf Lederman. Maier Wolf was born in nearby Ozarov, but lived all his life in Ivansk. In this region of Poland there are many forests and my grandfather's



Ivansk. Early 20th century.

My Paternal Grandparents, Meir Wolf and Feige Sara Lederman. My grandparents were very religious but I know very little about them.



My Father, Vienna 1924

In this picture my father was 24 years old and about to be married to my mother. He spoke Yiddish as well as Polish and German. When we immigrated to Colombia he became fluent in Spanish. When I made aliya, he wrote long letters to me in Spanish. I regret that I did not save his letters.



1928. Vienna. Passport Photo

My mother and I appear in this passport photo taken when my parents were planning to visit Ivansk. But for some reason the trip was cancelled. After immigrating to Austria my father never returned to Poland and never saw his parents again.



1928. Vienna. My Family

This family photo was taken about 1928. Mother is standing beside a gentleman who I cannot identify, and I am standing in front of my mother. My father is holding my sister, Frieda. My aunt Roschi Nussbaum (my mother's sister) is seated beside my father.

occupation was the trade in wood. Maier Wolf was married twice: his first wife was Tobi Goldhar. Tobi died in a great fire that destroyed much of Ivansk (about 1892), just a few months after she had given birth to her daughter, Tobsche. After her death, my grandfather married Tobi's younger sister, Faige Sara Goldhar.

The Nazis murdered my grandparents and three of their children, Meilech, Perale and Israel, as well as other members of our extended family (see: www.lederman.info). My father's brother Joel died in Ivansk in the 1930s and his remaining 8 siblings emigrated from Europe before the World War II, as described below.

Like other Jewish boys of his age, my father obtained religious education at the cheder in Ivansk. He was not allowed to attend a "regular" school. Nevertheless, he learned to write and read Polish. He studied in secret in the attic to prevent his father from finding out what he was doing. The family was so religious that it was considered a sin to acquire secular knowledge.

At the end of the First World War, when he was only 18 years old, my father decided to leave Ivansk. I think the major reason for leaving home was the dismal economic situation in Poland; at that time the economy had deteriorated so much that it was impossible for my father to make a living. In addition, he may have wanted to escape the confines of strict orthodoxy. Several other youngsters made the same decision. I never knew why his destination was Vienna, how he arranged to get there, or how he managed to survive after his arrival. My father was supposed to study at a yeshiva in Vienna, but very early he abandoned this plan and entered in to the current of commerce. He was not very successful at it. It is depressing to think that I never asked my father to tell me more about this phase in his life. Perhaps this will serve as a lesson to other parents and children to share their families' experiences!

My mother was born on Purim in 1901 in Dobromil, a little shtetl in West Galicia (also called Mapolska, "Little Poland"). Before WW I, this part of Poland was controlled by Austria. In 1914 the Russians occupied Dobromil and one month later, an outbreak of cholera forced many inhabitants to abandon the town. Frimet Blasbalg, my grandmother, died during the epidemic. Around this time my maternal grandfather Nachum Nussbaum and my great grandmother Feige Blasbalg, decided to leave Dobromil together with my mother's sister and brother, aunt Roschi and uncle Albert. Their destination was Vienna. Feige died in Vienna one year later and was buried at the old Jewish cemetery on 20 September 1915. I know the exact date because I was in Vienna in 1962 and visited her humble grave.

At the age of 24 my father met my mother, Bluma Esther (I do not know how or where they met) and they married on the 17th of February 1924 at the Schifschul synagogue. The Hebrew date was 12 Adar I, 5684. Ten months later I was born at our home in the Franz Hochedlinger Strasse and my sister Frieda arrived on the 27th of February 1926. My youngest sister, Florencia (Florence) was born in 1936 after my family had immigrated to Colombia.

We had a very pleasant childhood. I remember the Wiener Wald (Viennese forest) and the Donau River (Danube); the Prater, my school a few blocks from where the Verainsgasse where we lived in the Zweiter Bezirk (2nd district) of Vienna. I also recall Der Polische Schul (The Polish Shul) where my maternal grandfather used to take me on Shabbat. I had several good friends; one of them was Ernst Weiner, whom I met 40 years later in Israel. In 1932-1933 I attended Der Bibelschule (Talmud Torah) at the Synagogen Vereines Beth Israel on the Leopoldgasse, and in 1933-1934 I was enrolled in the Volksschule (Public School) at the Pazmanitengasse, near my home. One thing I shall never forget: non-Jewish children threw stones at us on our way to school and cried "Juden raus", even before the Anschluss. I was eight years old and did not understand the meaning of this, but later I found out exactly what it meant.

At the beginning of the year 1934 I started my studies at the Zwi Peres Chajes Gymnasium, a Zionist school founded by Dr. Chajes who was a very good friend of Theodor Herzl. Three months later, my time at the gymnasium and my life in Vienna came to an end because my family fled Austria.

After he decided to take us out of Austria, my father left Vienna a few months before the rest of the family in order to prepare for our arrival in Bogotá, Colombia. His older brother, Naftali, was already there. In the early 1920s Naftali had left Ivansk for Palestine where he lived in Petah Tikvah. But the living conditions were so unbearable that he soon returned to Ivansk. In 1928 Naftali sailed alone for Colombia where it was easy to get a visa if you indicated that you were farmer. No, he was not a farmer, but like other Jews he had to tell this falsehood to gain entry. Naftali returned to Poland temporarily on two occasions, and in 1931 he and his wife Gitel (Rothstein), their daughter, Perla and three sons, Srukko Joseph, Jacob and Abraham immigrated to Colombia. Like many other arriving Jews, I think he was initially a peddler but eventually he came to own three haberdasheries in central Bogotá.

What prompted my father to leave Austria? To understand his reasons we have to look at the turmoil in Austria in the early 1930s. In 1932 Engelbert Döllfuss (Christian Socialist Party) became the Chancellor of Austria. Encouraged by Hitler the Austrian Nazis opposed Döllfuss and agitated for political and economic union with Germany. They won considerable support in the 1932 provincial elections. Following Hitler's ascent to power in 1933, the propaganda campaign to unite Austria with Germany greatly intensified and the idea appealed to the majority of Austrians. Determined to stand up to the Nazis, Döllfuss dissolved the parliament, banned the Nazis Party and governed by emergency decree. Nazis-engineered riots and terrorism broke out and relations with Germany became very tense.

Although he was not a Nazis, Döllfuss was a fascist and admired Benito Mussolini. In August of 1933 he met with Il Duce to form an alliance. Mussolini was interested in maintaining Austria as a buffer between Italy and Germany and agreed to guarantee Austrian independence. Döllfuss hoped the alliance would strengthen his hold on the government and in 1934 he dissolved the Social Democratic Party (which contained many pro-Nazis) and joined forces with the Home Guard (Heimwehr) to form his own political party, the Fatherland Front (Vaterländische Front). He imposed a new, anti-democratic constitution for Austria. Opposition by Austrian and German Nazis exploded; turmoil and violence were rampant. On July 25, 1934, a band of Nazis seized the chancellery and tried to take over the government. Döllfuss was taken prisoner and assassinated. But the Nazi putsch failed, at least for the moment. Then, on 12 March 1938 Hitler's troops marched into Austria and the Anschluss (annexation) became a reality.

In this atmosphere of chaos and fear my father had the foresight to abandon our home in Vienna forever. Four months after his departure for Bogotá, my mother, my sister Frieda and I were on our way to Colombia. We took a train to the Italian port of Genoa. The highlight of that part of the journey was seeing a Zeppelin from the window of the train. We embarked on the "Horacio", an Italian ship, which was destroyed by the Allies during World War II. In December 1934, after about 3 weeks at sea, we arrived at Puerto Colombia and stayed a few days in the nearby city of Barranquilla with a Jewish family, the Goldsteins. Then, we left in a little boat to sail up the Magdalena River. The journey lasted about a week and we made our first contact with Colombians during that time. I learned to love and respect the Colombian people. After arriving at



**Uncle Naftali and His Family
1930. Ostrov (Ostrowiece)**

My uncle Naftali (my father's brother) and aunt Esther Gitel Rothstein (both seated) were born in Ivansk but their four children were born in Ostrov. The family immigrated to Colombia in 1931, where Naftali no longer continued to dress as an orthodox Jew. An unidentified man stands between my aunt and uncle.



1933. Vienna. Public School

This is my class at the Volksschule (Public School) 2nd district, Patzmaniten starse No. 26. The photo was taken 1 year before we left for Colombia. I am in the back row, 5th from the left. My friend Ernst Weiner is in the front row, 2nd from the left. After 40 years Ernst and I met up again in Israel and both of us live in Bat Yam. During the war, Ernst was imprisoned in a concentration camp in Holland. About 10 boys in our class were Jewish: all of us were subjected to anti-Semitic actions by some of our Gentile schoolmates.



Our Street



Our House

1962. Vienna. Vereingasse, Our Home

In 1962 I visited Vienna for the first time since leaving Austria in 1934. Many Jews lived in the neighborhood; our nearby Shul & Talmud Torah were destroyed during Kristalnacht.



1934. Vienna. Police Exit Permit

To leave Austria my father required a police certificate testifying to his good character. In part it reads, "We certify that Moszek Ledermann, was born in Poland on January 14, 1900 and lives in Vienna, 2nd district, Vereingasse 3. The record of his conduct allows that he can be granted a visa from the consulate of Colombia and can leave the country [Austria] without any restrictions." We were one of the lucky ones who were able to leave Austria before the Anschluss in 1938.

Barrancabermeja Port, we took a train to our final destination, Bogotá, the capital of Colombia where my father was expecting us.

Bogotá in the 1930s was a small and quiet city of 200,000 inhabitants. Today about 8 million people live there. There has never been a very large Jewish population in Colombia; most live in the larger cities (Bogotá, Barranquilla, Cali and Medellín). The current population is estimated at 3,500 Jews out of a total population of 41,000,000. The number of Jews is steadily declining because the younger people are leaving for Israel and the USA.

The first Jews who settled in Colombia arrived in the 16th century but were purged by the Inquisition. It was only in the mid 19th century that Jews began to return. First came the Sephardim, mainly of Syrian origin; the Ashkenazim followed in the early 1920s. The influx of Jews in the 20th century was primarily the result of restrictive immigration quotas imposed by the United States. The first arrivals felt lost and lonely. Their vitality and their hopes pulled them through. They shouldered packs, like Jews in so many other Western countries, and went knocking (klapper), from door to door peddling their wares. My father was one of them. Later he opened a haberdashery that he operated for about 30 years until he had a heart attack. Then for a while he worked in my brother-in-law's jewelry shop until he retired.

In 1936 three of my father's siblings left Ivansk and joined us in Colombia. These included uncle Mendel and his wife Rushe Meizels; uncle Binim, his wife Matl Szeinman and children (Bernardo and Pincho) and aunt Chaya, her husband, Alter Majerovicz and their daughter (Perla). Our families established a small and likely the only Ivansker colony in Colombia. My father's remaining brothers and sisters left for Toronto, Canada including, uncle Heinach and his wife Minnie Green; uncle Leibl (married Ruth Zalzman) and aunt Deborah (married Moses Rosen). All of their children were born in Toronto. I remember that my uncle Leibl came to see us in Vienna before he left for Canada; I have a picture of him with my parents, my sister Frieda and my aunt Roschi.

The Jews in Colombia prospered and established textile industries, furniture and other concerns. They provided the population with clothes and shoes. At first the descendants of Spanish, German, East European and Hungarian Jews maintained separate communities. But over time they have become closer to one another and built synagogues, social clubs and other institutions. Jewish education was not of high quality in Colombia until 1948 when the Colegio Colombo Hebreo was founded in Bogotá. I attended the ceremony when the cornerstone was placed in the school's foundation. Later, other first-rate Jewish schools opened in Cali, Barranquilla and Medellín.

Beginning a few days after the New Year 1935, my sister Frieda and I started our first day in school. I was 10 and Frieda was 8 years old. The school we attended was called Colegio Americano and was both an elementary and secondary school. Colegio Americano had a Presbyterian orientation. In comparison to the Catholic schools, where prayers were mandatory for all children, our school was very liberal and provided a comfortable environment for Jewish children. I finished high school in November 1943, and in 1944 I began my medical studies at the Facultad de Medicina, Universidad Nacional in Bogotá. In 1951 as part of my government service, I spent a year practicing "rural medicine" in a town called Zipaquirá, which has a gigantic salt mine that continues to operate until this day. There, I worked at the Municipal District of Hygiene and was in charge of the laboratory and a public campaign against venereal diseases. After presenting my thesis, "Venereal Diseases and Parasitism in Zipaquirá" I graduated medicine in August 1952.

In 1952 another big event happened in my life: I married Margarita Dobrzynski on the 1st of March. I met Margarita on 9 April 1948: I remember the date because of a terrible tragedy: Jorge Eliecer Gaitan, the popular candidate for the presidency of Colombia, was assassinated in the center of



1936 (circa). Bogota. Holiday Dinner

The family has gathered at a festive table but I do not know what they are celebrating. The dinner is being held in the home of my uncle Naftali and aunt Gitel who are seated at the head of the table (Note pictures of my paternal grandparents on the wall behind them.) The people seated on the left (from front to rear) are Binim, Matl, Mendel and Rushe. On the right are Matl's brother, my mother and my father. The ambience of the scene testifies to the material success Naftali and Gitel enjoyed in Colombia. Other members of my family also succeeded in bettering their situation in Colombia.

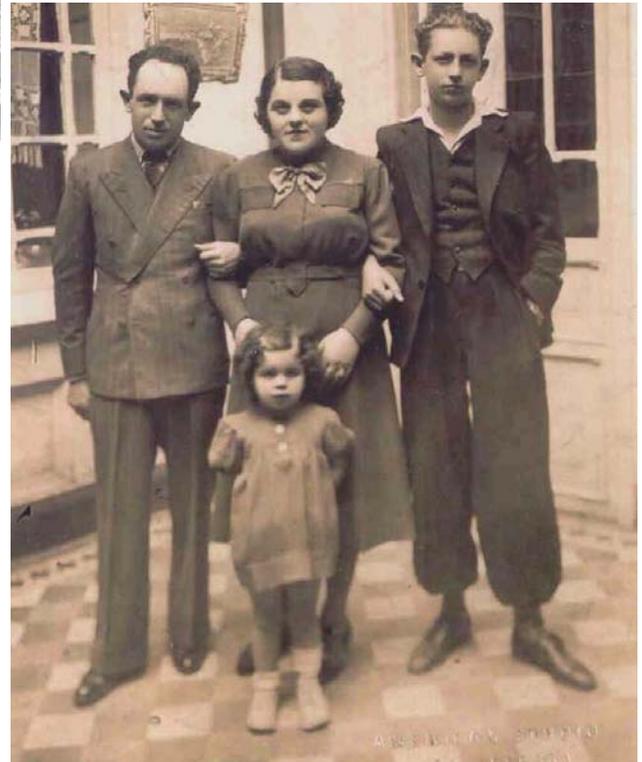


1939. Bogota. The Lederman Clan

The family gathers for a photo. Back Row (left to right): Me, uncle Mendel, my father, uncle Naftali, uncle Binim, Jacob & Abraham*. Middle Row: Frieda, aunt Rushe, my mother, aunt Matl, Perla*. Children standing: Florencia & Srukko-Israel. Children seated in Front Row: Bernardo** & Pincho. (Cousins born in Ostrov (*) or in Ivansk (**))

1939. Bogota. My Parents, Florencia and Me

This photo was taken on the patio of our home in 1939. My youngest sister was 3 years old and I was 15. I was quite tall and dressed in the very latest fashion. I was not especially interested in sports but did enjoy volleyball and ping pong. By contrast my grandchildren are very athletic. The older boys are ardent basketball players, and I attend many of their games to shout encouragement and enjoy the spectacle.



Bogotá. This day was called “El Bogotazo” and sparked mob rioting and violence that killed about 900 people. Over the next 15 years of political unrest about 300,000 people lost their lives. I will leave the details of these events to the historians. Anyhow, on this day I was a passenger in a car carrying my sister and her friend, Margarita home from their school. I did not know Margarita, but a year later she remembered me when we met at a birthday party. Margarita graduated from high school in 1949 and on her 17th birthday we celebrated our engagement at her parents’ home. She started courses in Chemistry at the Universidad Nacional, but after our marriage in 1952 she did not complete her studies.

Margarita’s parents, Rafael Dobrzynsky and Tyla Yagodzynski, were born in Losice, in the Province of Lublin, Siedlce, in eastern Poland. Many documents have been published about Losice and a special website is dedicated to this shtetl: < www.zchor.org/losice >. Losicer descendants, including Margarita and I, are currently involved in a project to restore its Jewish cemetery.

In 1953 Margarita and I decided to get in touch with the outside world before I started my practice. We traveled to New York where I studied at the Beth Israel Hospital in the Department of Pathology. I spent a few months doing post mortems and histological laboratory work and then took a year of residency at the Hospital for Joint Diseases. Margarita became pregnant and we returned to Bogotá where Natan, our son, was born. From 1954-1957 I was a resident in Internal Medicine specializing in Cardiology at the Hospital San Juan de Dios. In 1957 Abbo Shaio, a Jewish magnate in the Colombian textile industry, donated a considerable sum to build the first Cardiology Center called, “Fundacion Shaio”. I was one of the staff doctors. Initially, the center specialized in congenital heart diseases, and I witnessed the first case of open-heart surgery in Colombia.

During this period I opened my private practice, but I was not entirely satisfied with my life. Throughout my student days I was very involved in Jewish community affairs and some friends and I founded a Juvenile Zionist Organization called “Negba” (Negba is a kibbutz that put up a heroic defense against the Egyptians during the War of Independence). For me, such activity was one way to avoid assimilation. During the War of Independence some of my friends went to Israel as volunteers to take part in the struggle for statehood. I was not one of them. After ten years of practice I decided that I could no longer sit back and allow others to contribute to the Zionist dream. I had to make aliya. In 1963, together with Margarita and our two children, Natan and Rebeca (Rebecca), we started a new life in Israel. It was not an easy decision and the first years were very hard.

First, I worked as a general practitioner at the Kupat Cholim in Jerusalem. In 1966 a Cardiac Rehabilitation Institute was founded at the Tel Hashomer-Sheba Medical Center and I was accepted on the staff. The director was Dr. Jan Kellerman who was a pioneer in the field of cardiac rehabilitation. Over a period of 9 years I acquired a great deal of experience and then became a civilian doctor in the Israel Defense Forces in Cheil Harefuah providing comprehensive medical and cardiac evaluations for military personnel. At age of 65 I retired, but continued practicing cardiology at the Ichilov-Soroka Medical Center in Tel Aviv until I reached the age of 75 years.

In the meantime, what happened with our two children? In 1982 Natan graduated as a physician from the Faculty of Medicine-Hadassah, Hebrew University-Jerusalem and in 1982 interned at the Tel Hashomer Hospital in Internal Medicine. From 1980-1984 he was in the IDF as a physician in the Golani Corps. In 1989 he received his boards in Internal Medicine and in 1993 his boards in Gastroenterology. He also specialized in Medical Administration and is one of the co-directors at the Kupat Cholim Meuchedet. He married Ronit Elkays in 1982 and they have four children, three

**1945. Bogota.
My Sister Frieda**

Frieda occupies a special place in my heart. I don't think we ever quarreled, and she and her husband, Isaac were always ready to help me. When she married Isaac I wrote in my diary (in Spanish): "Now is when I love Frieda much more than a sister. It is strange, life is always a paradox. When your loved ones are at your side, they are part of the landscape. But when they leave us, how much we feel their absence." Frieda and Isaac had 3 daughters; unfortunately, Isaac died about 16 years ago and Frieda never remarried. She has several grandchildren. We keep in constant touch by telephone and by email. About 2 years ago I went to Bogota to be with Frieda to celebrate her grandson's wedding and to comfort her in her illness.



**1956. Bogota.
My Sister Florencia**

Florencia is my youngest sister: she was born in Bogota, the first authentic Colombian in our family. She is married to Jose Rosenbaum: they do not have any children but Florencia regards her nieces and nephews as her own. Florencia is always on the run and has a generous spirit. She took care of my father for 3 years during his illness. After the death of Frieda's husband, Isaac she assumed responsibility for running his jewelry business. And now she is tending to Frieda and Jose, both of whom are ill. Despite all this Florencia remains ever the optimist and never complains.



1950. Bogota. Our Engagement

This photo was taken just after Margarita and I became engaged. We've been married for 52 years. Margarita is the best thing that ever happened to me. We have a great life together, despite some of the wear and tear of getting older. We adore our children and grandchildren and try to be with them as much as possible. Naturally our grandchildren enjoy Margarita's cooking. After all, she studied chemistry for 2 years and runs her kitchen like a laboratory, combining all the ingredients in just the right proportions. This results in a special Jewish flavor, as it was with her mother, Tyla. Hopefully, we'll have many more good years together with our family.

boys and one girl. Avihai already is in the I.D.F and his brother Guy starts military service next year. Itamar is ten years old and Adi is eight.

After completing her military service in the Communication Corps, our daughter Rebeca studied bookkeeping, accounting and tax consulting. She was employed in Tax Revenue-Tel Aviv Branch. She married Moshe Schuster in 1988 and they have two children, Barak (12 years) and Nurit (7 years old). Moshe works in carpentry and theatre set design: his creations have appeared in national and international exhibitions.

There is much more I could write about my life and my family. I have tried to be faithful to the Jewish and humanitarian traditions of my ancestors. I feel as though I was born in the little town of Ivansk even though I have never been there. In my heart and in my dreams I sense how my ancestors struggled day after day against the hostile elements of nature and the anti-Jewish feelings of the local population. But perhaps more important, I also share with them the moments of solace; the Shabbat and the festivals; their love for learning; their compassion; their readiness to help their neighbors, despite their own hardships; and their absolute faith in the Almighty.

For me, my ancestors are my guides and I have tried to emulate them through my father and my mother who always helped me and inspired my ambitions. I am very proud of them. When my wife and I decided to leave Columbia, they never showed opposition. I knew that in their hearts they were sad and worried. So great was their loneliness, that a few years later they made aliya. But after a few years they returned to Colombia because they did not want to be a burden to us. My father was in ill health and my mother felt that in Bogotá my sisters would be in a better position to assist in his care. I went to visit them: my father was very sick and I knew that I would never see him again. Two years later he died and I could not be present at his burial. A week later my sister telephoned that our mother wanted to see me. I was there within two days and my mother died two weeks later. In an interval of one month I had become an orphan. This time I accompanied my sisters and the rest of my family to my mother's funeral. I thank my parents for saving us from the Holocaust and for bringing me up to be a proud Jew and a citizen of Israel.

I am grateful for all that has happened to me during almost eight decades of life. As a human being I feel that I have attained something and I am satisfied with who I am. Of course, I have many defects and have made numerous mistakes. But I tried to be faithful to the commandments Moses delivered to us. I am not a religious Jew, but I guard tradition and have transmitted this to my children.

As a physician I tried first of all not to harm my patients, "primum non nocere". In Israel I could not accomplish as much as I wanted in my field. As a newcomer, I was limited in my ability to speak Hebrew and my way of thinking was different from my Israeli colleagues. But I am very satisfied with one thing; my son completed what I left unfinished. I am very proud of Natan because he decided, without asking me, to become a physician. I never told him what profession to choose. But I remember that when he was still a child someone asked him what he wanted to be as a grown man; without hesitation he answered, "a cardiologist".

My daughter Rebeca has always been at our side in moments of need. She is in contact with us every day and always available with unconditional support.

Our six grandchildren add to our lives many satisfactions, each one in their own way. The best moments are when we are together. They give meaning to us and comfort us always with their smiles and spontaneity.



1973. Israel. Distinguished Service Award

After the Yom Kippur War in 1973, I was given this award for my role as a physician in the IDF. I was not a front-line soldier but tended to Israeli prisoners after they had been released by the Egyptians. My medical colleagues and I were responsible for determining whether the freed prisoners could be sent home or required further medical attention. Note the signature of Shimon Peres in the bottom left of the award.



1975. Rebeca in IDF Uniform

My daughter, Rebeca served for two years in the Israel Defence Forces in the Communication Corps. Today, she is married to Moshe Schuster and they have two children, Barak (11 years) and Nurit (7 years old).



Natan Returns From A Raid into Lebanon

This photo appeared in The Jerusalem Post in October, 1980. Natan (third from the left) and his comrades raided Jarmak and Shaika in Southern Lebanon. Katyusha rockets had been launched from these towns into the Galilee. Paratroops and the Golani infantry unit marched for some six hours over difficult terrain to reach and destroy the launch sites and achieved complete surprise. There were no Israeli casualties.

1980. Israel. Natan Becomes an IDF Officer

My son, Natan began his 4 year compulsory military service in the Israel Defence Forces as a Medical Officer in the Golani Corps. Both my children have served Israel and helped to create an army that gives so much hope to Jews everywhere. Despite all the tragedies that befell our people in the past, it is the strength, determination and courage of our young people that assures that we will never again permit anyone to lead us to the slaughter.



1989. Israel. My Retirement Party

After 17 years of service I retired from my duties as a civilian physician in the IDF. Here I am with numerous fine colleagues who have come to give me a happy send-off. The majority were much younger (and prettier) than me. They were defending our country and it was a privilege to work with them.

And what would I be without my wife Margarita? When we married she was a very young woman of great intelligence. Without her unwavering support in building our home in Israel I would never have been able to fulfill my dream. She knew that it would be more difficult for her than for me, but she did not hesitate for a moment. In Colombia Margarita had domestic help but in Israel she did everything: cleaning, cooking, washing ironing, sewing, helping the children with their homework and much more. I do not know how she managed all this because I was not very helpful. I only appreciated this after I retired. I have indeed been fortunate to have Margarita at my side.

Margarita and I have traveled and seen many beautiful things in this world. My journey began in Ivansk and Dobromil and Margarita's in Losice. Our identities are tied to these tiny places that are barely visible on the map. I am thankful to the Colombian people who received us with kindness and gave us the opportunity to rebuild our lives in their land. And most of all, I am grateful to the Land of Israel where Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Rachel founded our people and gave us our heritage.



2002. Bogota. My Sisters and I

It is a long way to Bogotá but the telephone and email allow us to keep in constant touch with my sisters Frieda (sitting in the photo) and her family and Florencia (standing) and her husband and with Margarita's sister, Sula Gleiser and her family. Together we have observed many happy as well as sad occasions. We have many other friends and relatives in Bogotá, and it is hard for all of us to be separated for long periods of time. Since 1967 Margarita and I have returned to Bogotá on a regular basis and our parents and our sisters have visited us in Israel. Moreover, the younger generations of our Colombian family have been here on extended visits experiencing what it's like to live in Israel.



2002. Bogota. Margarita and I

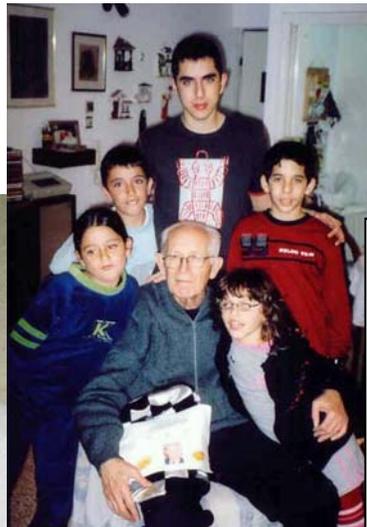
I am not good at expressing praise, but in the last chapter of the Proverbs, King Solomon eloquently described "Eshet Chayil," ("Woman of Valor") which eulogizes the ideal Jewish woman. His poem opens with a timeless tribute: "Who can find a virtuous woman? For her, her price is far above rubies." In reading these verses I find a beautiful description of my dear Margarita. She radiates goodness to our children and me. Margarita is always there to comfort, to help, to advise and to maintain our household so well. Thanks to Margarita, and all other Jewish women of valor, the family unit is preserved and nurtured, permitting the Jewish people to overcome the challenges and the trials that we have faced before and that continue to confront us.



2003. Israel.

Avihai Finishes Basic Training

Avihai (my eldest grandson) is with his parents, Ronit and Natan. We have proudly gathered to celebrate Avihai's completion of basic training in the IDF. He's so young and has to bear such heavy responsibilities. I am hopeful that some day peace will come to our land and our young people will no longer have to train for war.



2003. Israel.

What More Can I Ask For?

Here I am surrounded by my beautiful grandchildren...it's the greatest pleasure!

Clockwise from the bottom left: Adi, Itamar, Guy, Barak and Nurit. Avihai is away on duty with the IDF.



2003. Israel. My Family Celebrates!

It's the 19th of December 2003. My family is gathered to celebrate my 79th birthday, the first night of Channukah and Erev Shabbat. L'Chaim!!!

The adults are (L to R): Margarita, Ronit, Natan, Me, Rebeca and Moshe. The children are: Adi, Itamar, Barak and Nurit. Guy is taking the photo and Avihai is on army duty.

People of a Thousand Towns

People of a Thousand Towns contains thousands of pictures of pre-World War II Jewish communities in Poland and other Eastern European countries. The collection forms part of YIVO's extensive photographic holdings and constitutes an incredible visual record of Jewish life in large cities as well as shtetls during the late 19th century to the early 1940s. In some cases, the pictures in the YIVO Archives are the only known photographic traces of communities later wiped out by the Nazis.

As far as I can determine, no photos of Ivansk appear on this web site. However, photographs of neighboring towns and their people can be found by searching the database. These include: Apt (Opatow), Bogoria, Klimontov (Klimontow), Lagov (Lagow), Rakov (Rakow), and Staszov (Staszow). This is an incredible resource!

<http://yivo1000towns.cjh.org/1000coll.asp>