

THE IVANSK PROJECT e-NEWSLETTER

Issue Number 26

September – October 2007

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Jack Brauner and his sister Ruchel Kesten, the authors of the Kesten-Brauner Map of Ivansk, gave our community an invaluable legacy to understanding our heritage.

- **Poland 2007: Return to Our Ancestral Shtetls, Ivansk and Rakow**
by Michael and Susan Copeland.

Michael and Susan, brother and sister, describe their journey to Poland to visit the shtetls where their father and grandfather were born.

- **Ivansk Humor** *by Albert P. Roberts.*

Al Roberts returns with a cache of stories featuring characters fresh out of the shtetl. Since he's not originally an Ivansker, Al has been granted an honorary degree in *Ivansker Narishkeit*.

To all of us and to the World,

L'Shanah Tova

A Happy, Healthy, Prosperous 5768

A Year Filled With Hope And Peace!

The Ivansk Project Temporary Web Address

<http://www.ivansk.thirdeyevue.net/>

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The Ivansk Project e-Newsletter, No. 26, September - October, 2007

IN MEMORIAM: JACK BRAUNER (1917 - 2007)

a tribute by his nephew, **Sydney Kasten**

Jerusalem, Israel



**Jack Brauner
Jerusalem, 1984**

My Uncle Jack Brauner, who collaborated with my mother in drawing up the K-B map passed away May 2 in Albuquerque, NM at the age of 90. He managed to leave Poland immediately before the outbreak of the war, leaving behind his mother, three brothers and aged grandfather. He was sponsored and received by his uncles in New York. He enlisted in the Army when the US entered the war and served in Europe. After the war he married Evelyn Pugatch and had with her three children, Arlene, Lennie and Mark. An adherent of Ze'ev Jabotinsky from the time of his youth in Poland he had strong feelings for Israel, as well as being a strong and grateful patriot of the land that took him in and gave him a life. He visited Israel a number of times. (On one of trips home he stopped in Poland to visit Ivansk. The only thing he could recognize was the church.) Many years ago he decided that when his time came he would be buried in Israel and accordingly bought a plot in the Eretz HaChaim cemetery Near Beit Shemesh. Shelly and Linda and I were there to receive his remains and to say a few words of farewell. The Chevra Kadisha who took care of the burial had ensured that there was a minyan so that Kaddish could be said.

May his soul be enfolded with the wreath of Life

Ed: Ivanskers are greatly indebted to Uncle Jack and to Syd's Mother (Ruchel Kesten) for what they contributed to our community. Their map of Ivansk, referred to as the Kesten-Brauner (K-B) Map, was hand drawn from memory in 1989, years after they left Poland. It is a remarkable and evocative depiction of the center of town as they remembered it from the 1930s. The map is a treasured resource for us and for future generations.

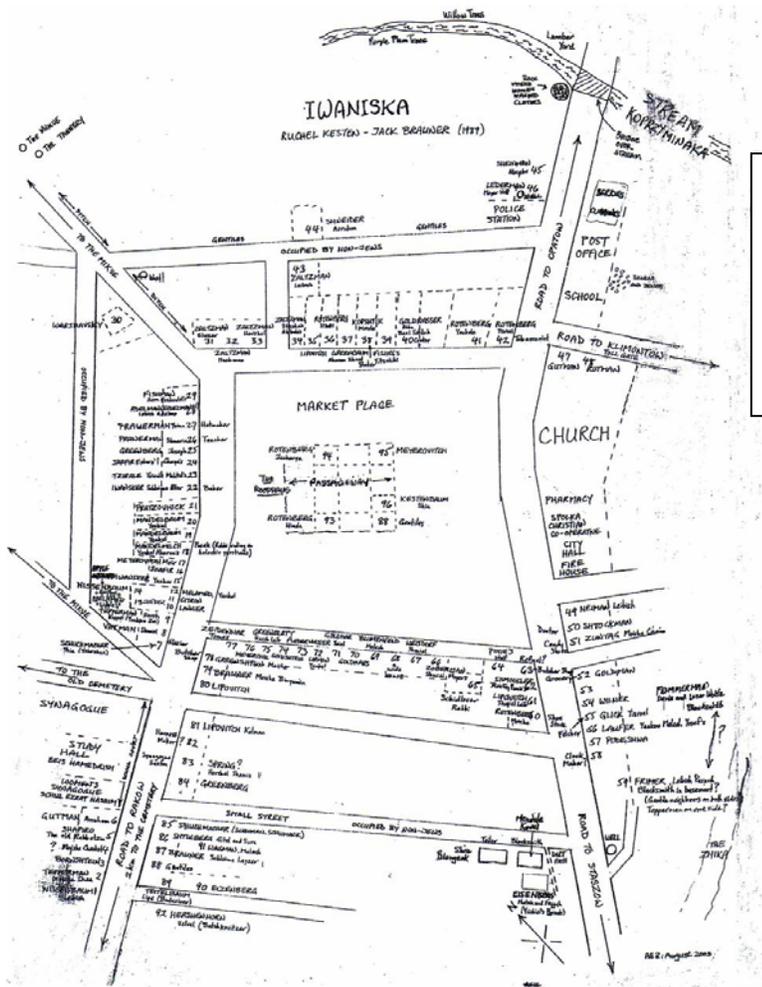
Today it is difficult to imagine that once most of us had no idea of the "layout" of Jewish Ivansk. The K-B Map became the tangible gateway to our past. A large copy hangs near my computer...it allows me to wander back in time and space. I can "see, hear and smell" things happening in the drawing. The jumble of the Jewish houses and the shops crowded around the market square, the Shul and Beis Hamedrish, the Mikveh, the Roodhaus, the tannery, the apple orchard, the place where women washed clothes by the stream and more; they're all there. Although there are a few minor inaccuracies in the drawing, they do not detract from its historical importance. But most significant, the names of many of the town's Jewish families are sited where they once lived and worked. And thanks to Arthur Zimmerman (Toronto) the map is periodically up-dated as new information is acquired by The Ivansk Project. The map is indispensable to anyone who visits or thinks about where we came from.

Recently, Hillel Kuttler, a journalist who writes for "Insight," a quarterly magazine published by the Jewish Exponent" (Philadelphia), spent an afternoon with my family and me gathering information about The Ivansk Project and the lives of our ancestors. During the course of our conversation I went upstairs and brought down the map. His first words were, "WOW!" That's the reaction of everyone who sees the map, including current inhabitants of the town.

Syd tells us that Uncle Jack returned to Ivansk sometime after the war. The fact that he recognized only the church is noteworthy. Every Ivansker who visits the shtetl automatically looks for evidence of what once was there. I still do. But it's a lost cause. Uncle Jack confirmed what we've been told by today's residents...nothing physical remains of our history except the cemetery. Still, there's something simple and unpolished about the town that lets me sense what used to be.

I am always humbled by what Jack's generation of Ivanskers had to go through and what they nevertheless accomplished. Uncle Jack's gratitude and service to his adopted land were laudable. And the love and honor in which his Kasten/Kesten family remembers him attests that he was a special person, someone all of us can admire.

**From all of us, "Thank you Uncle Jack!"
and as Syd put it, "May your soul be enfolded with the wreath of Life"**



The Kesten-Brauner Map of Ivansk

For better resolution access the map on our web site:
< <http://www.ivansk.thirdeyview.net/> >

Poland 2007: Return to Our Ancestral Shtetls, Ivansk and Rakow

by Michael and Susan Copeland



In September 1913, Anna (Chanche) Kaplansky (née Cukierman) left her home in the shtetl of Rakow to join her husband Samuel (Shmuel) in Canada. With her on the voyage were five-year-old Mary and two-year-old Max. After eight days at sea, they arrived in Quebec City on September 14, 1913.

Ninety-four years later in spring 2007, Max's son Michael Copeland and daughter Susan Copeland went to Poland to see where their father was born. Michael and Susan described their journey and it is presented in two parts. Here is what they found.

Michael and Susan at the Umschlagplatz in Warsaw

The Return, Part 1

by Michael Copeland

Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Let me begin by telling you a bit about me.

I was born in Toronto in 1938, and attended Clinton Street Public School and Forest Hill Collegiate Institute. I have a BA degree in Mathematics from the University of Toronto and studied Economics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Boston for several years but never did complete my PhD thesis. My first job was as a lecturer at City College of New York for three years. In 1968 I came back to Toronto to the Economics Department at York University, and retired from York in 2004.

In my first few years at York I was at loose ends which allowed me to spend a year studying Mandarin Chinese and later to be a New Democratic Party candidate in the 1972 and 1974 Canadian federal elections.

My first visit to China was in 1975. I had some chance to practice my (limited) Chinese, came to know China and the Chinese people a little, and listened to a lot of Cultural Revolution rhetoric. I came back convinced of the need for change in China, and have been an ardent supporter of China since the "Open Door Policy" following the death of Mao Zedong in 1976. I became active in the FCCFA (Federation of Canada-China Friendship Associations) and have been back to China many times since then, both teaching and on FCCFA delegations.

On the personal level, Judy and I have been married since 1962 and have two children, Jill, 39 and Peter 37, both lawyers. Jill and her Bill have two sweet daughters. I am a squash and tennis player and still ride my 1982 Kawasaki 550 LTD motorcycle on sunny summer days.

As you will read in her article, my sister Susan has been in Paris for two years, working for the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. In the fall of 2005 she suggested that I come to visit her. I responded that would be nice see Paris again, but that the two of us should include a short trip to Poland. Poland because that is where our family came from. Susan's accompanying article tells more about our ties to Ivansk and nearby Rakow.

Susan was enthusiastic, but the trip to Poland would have to wait one year. A opportunity to return to Yantai University in the spring of 2006 took me back to the coastal Chinese city I consider my second home. In the fall of 2006 Susan and I began to plan the spring 2007 visit to Poland.

On the afternoon of April 18 Air France took me from sprawling Toronto Pearson International Airport bound for Paris. The last time I saw Paris was 1956, when Pearson was just Malton Airport. That was between high school and university on a summer student bus tour of Europe; I have been elsewhere in Europe a few times in the interim.

Very early on the morning of April 19 I disembarked at Aéroport Charles de Gaulle and took the train from the terminal into Paris for ten days with Susan and then a week in Poland.

The stay in Paris was a chance to wander around Paris again after 50 years and to prepare for the upcoming trip to Poland. A chance to spend more time with Susan than since we were kids. I had left Toronto for Boston and graduate school when she was just 15. Soon after I returned to Toronto she moved to Montréal and then Ottawa. We had not spent any extended time under the same roof since 1961. Being with Susan was really the best part of the trip, but this article is about my impression of Poland so I will not elaborate here.

On the evening of Saturday, April 28 Susan and I took a Wizz Airlines discount flight from Paris to Warsaw arriving near midnight. Greg Gregorczyk kindly picked us up at the Warsaw Frederic Chopin Airport and took us to the hotel downtown. And he was there with his kids Adam and Basia to join us for for brunch the next morning.

The five of us visited the Warsaw Ghetto Memorial and walked around the neighbourhood. Greg dropped us off at the Nozyk Synagogue which happens to be adjacent to the Yiddish Theatre. After some time in and around the synagogue we looked into the theatre. In the lobby there was a display of photos of the history of the theatre. We learned that "Fiddler on the Roof" was scheduled for the evening and that we could get standing room tickets for the evening show. We spent the rest of the day wandering in the Old Town and returned to the theatre in the evening. The show turned out to be in Polish rather than Yiddish and the audience was almost entirely Polish. They, and we, enjoyed the show immensely.



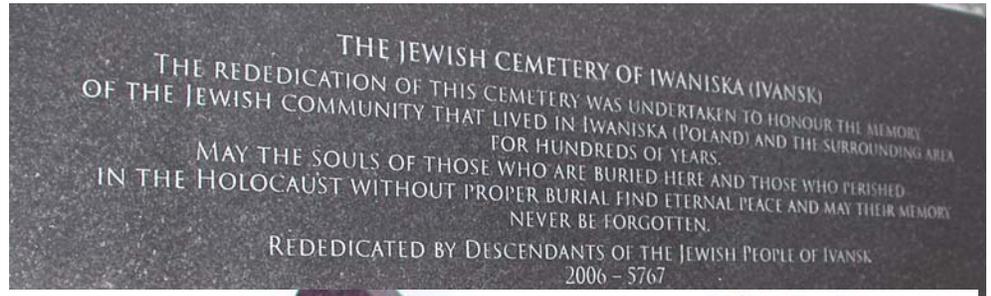
**"Marco"
Bousenna Mahfoud**

The next morning we picked up the rental car and headed south headed for Sandomierz (not far from Ivansk) and the Hotel Bastowy recommended by Norton Taichman. We checked into the hotel and had lunch outdoors at a restaurant on the medieval town square.

After lunch we drove to Ivansk (Polish: Iwaniska). Norton and Greg had put us in touch with Boussenna (Marco) Mahfoud, an Algerian who teaches French and English in Ivansk. Marco showed us the town square and the site where the synagogue once stood. And then we drove to the Jewish cemetery with the restored stone wall. It was a cloudy afternoon, but the view of the surrounding landscape made a deep impression on this very secular Jew.

When I submitted the article to Norton he suggested that I expand the hint at what I felt that cloudy afternoon in the Ivansk cemetery. Number one was the beauty of the landscape, and the silence of that moment on that hillside. This must have been a wonderful place to live when Jews first came to Poland, and for much of their time in Poland. And how Jewish life here deteriorated in the 19th century and came to a screeching halt in the 20th century.

I thought of my father as a child very near here, and of forebearers of whom I know so little. Later in Rakow, where my father Max walked as a child 90-some years earlier, I was very happy that Susan and I had come. Being there helped me grasp the immensity of the 1913 journey from Rakow to Toronto. Bubba Chanche made with Mary and infant Max. And of Samuel's lonely 1911 voyage. And of my good fortune to have grown up in Canada, able to return and begin to understand something of what life had been there so long ago.

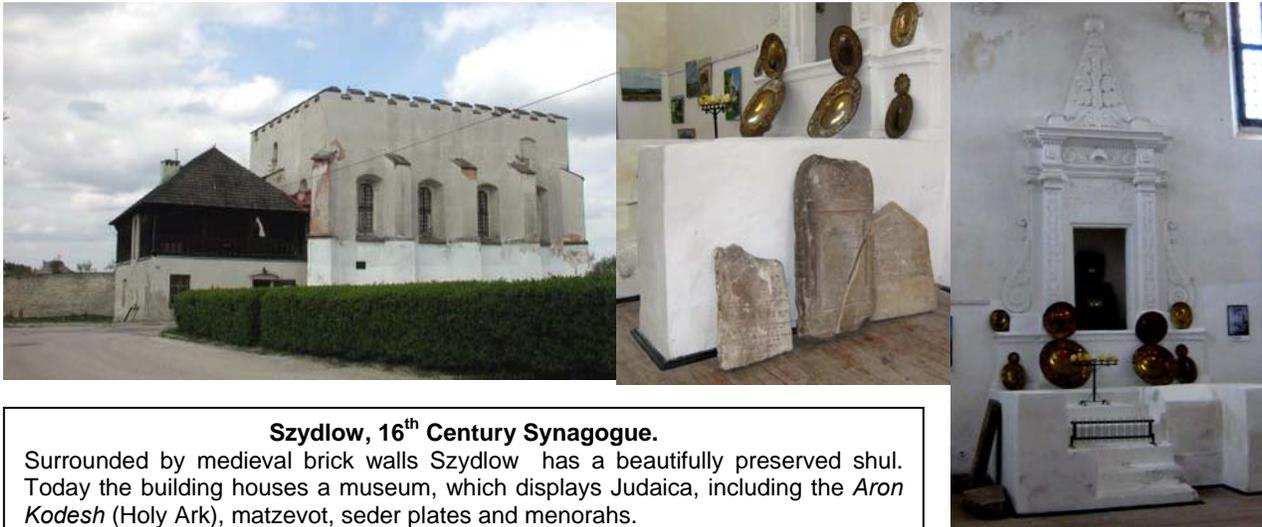


We dropped Marco off in town and then followed ul. Rakowska past the Ivansk Cemetery to Rakow. We had the name and address of Wanda Lukasik from cousins Betty Feder and Rosa Nirenberg, daughters of Malka (Owsiany) Nirenberg, an Argentine Holocaust survivor who was my father's first cousin. Wanda's family had sheltered Malka's mother during the war. Malka, her daughters, son and grandchildren had visited Poland in the 1980s and 90s.

We circled Rakow several times looking for Wanda's house with no luck and headed back to the town square to ask for directions again. When we got there a rainbow framed the square. In a

small grocery store on the square we were met by surprise when we asked the woman behind the counter for directions. "Wanda is my neighbor," she indicated across the Polish-English language barrier. A moment or two later her husband Jan came out from the back room. He had worked for four years in the United States in the 1970s and spoke some English. He jumped into his van and led us to Wanda's house.

Wanda and her husband Josef were out. Only her mother was there and she spoke no English. Jan explained our purpose and that we would like to come back in the morning. We left a note explaining how to reach us at the hotel. That evening we got a call from Wanda's niece Izabella (a government employee in Warsaw who speaks English). Yes, Wanda would be glad to see us.



Szydlow, 16th Century Synagogue.

Surrounded by medieval brick walls Szydlow has a beautifully preserved shul. Today the building houses a museum, which displays Judaica, including the *Aron Kodesh* (Holy Ark), matzevot, seder plates and menorahs.

The meeting with Wanda and Josef was the highlight of our trip. They and her mother welcomed us with coffee and pastry. While the conversation was very limited because of the language barrier, we did manage to communicate with photos and a family tree we had brought along. Susan did most of the talking for us. It was a very warm and moving visit to their home. They took us on a tour of the very small town, to the memorial marking the location of the Jewish cemetery and to the house where Malka's mother had been sheltered. Later that day we headed to Kielce, stopping in the walled town of Szydlow where we spent some time visiting the sixteenth century synagogue/museum.

The next morning we left Sandomierz headed for Krakow. The rolling countryside was alive with apple orchards in blossom and lush fields coming to life in the spring. I was surprised when I got back to Toronto that the lilacs here were just beginning to bloom. Why do they blossom earlier in Poland?

We were two days in Krakow and a day at Auschwitz before we drove back to Warsaw and the return flight to Paris. Krakow is a major tourist destination for Europeans. Think of Prague 15 years ago, a delightful Old Town, beautiful churches and castles. Around the squares are restaurants with sophisticated menus and quality service.

What was once a Jewish town, Kazimierz long ago became a district of Krakow. Many of the old synagogues remain. In the High Synagogue there was a photo exhibit comparing shtetl and big city Jewish life. And the bookstore below had many, many books on aspects of Polish Jewish history in several languages. On the square there are restaurants featuring Jewish menus. I must

admit that the wood carvings of Klezmer musicians and Hassids in prayer threw me, but alongside were Polish Noblemen and women in historic costumes, and dogs and cats, etc.

Auschwitz must have had a far greater impact on Susan than it did on me. My 1956 European student tour itinerary included stops in Amsterdam, Munich, Rome and London in addition to Paris. While in Munich, two friends and I left the group for one day and made a trip to Dachau. Both Auschwitz and Dachau are unimaginably depressing places.

At the Auschwitz Museum I distanced myself from the horror by trying to be critical of the content of the displays. They told the story of the German occupation and the suffering of both Jews and Poles in a way that I found to be accurate and respectful. All over Poland there are memorials and small museums that deal with Jewish life in Poland. Almost every town has an ul. Zydowska (Jewish Street). The Ghetto Memorial in Warsaw is moving and a Museum of the History of Polish Jews is to open in two years time – the ground-breaking ceremony was in June 2007.

Back here in Toronto, working on this piece, I am struck with comparisons between Poland and China. The mood in Poland reminded me of that in China in the 1990s. Both are a decade and a half removed from the fall of Communist planning systems. While there were initial doubts as to the success of market systems that were developing, 15 years out, it is clear that the economy is booming and the standard of living has improved significantly. There is a sense of confidence and pride in the economy.

Both China and Poland suffered under foreign domination. In Poland's case it was rule by Swedes, Russians, Austro-Hungarians, Germans. In China's case it was invasion and control by imperialism, British, French and Japanese. Both countries have a feeling of nationalism, being on the right track, their own path and in control of their own destiny.

People, here in Canada and some Poles we met, warned of some remaining anti-Semitism in Poland but I did not experience anything but kindness from the people we met. Seeing and walking the ground where my father was born and family came from was well worth doing. Leaving family and that beautiful countryside by train and steamship for life in the new world required tremendous courage and strength. Going to Poland greatly deepened my appreciation of just how much.

The Return, Part 2

by **Susan Copeland**

Ottawa, Ontario, Canada (and Paris, France)

Introducing Ourselves Michael and I and our brother Paul grew up in Toronto. Both our maternal and paternal grandparents were from Poland and came to Canada just before the First World War. My brothers still live in Toronto but I (the baby sister) moved to Montreal in the early 70s and then to Ottawa in the late 80s. I retired from the Canadian public service in 2002 and have been working in Paris since autumn 2005. My husband is still in Ottawa and we are shuttling back and forth across the Atlantic. Our son (24) and daughter (27) live in Montreal and make the occasional trip to France to visit maman.

Our Family Here is the condensed family history. Our father, Max (born Kaplansky, he changed his name to Copeland in 1933) was born in 1911 in Rakow, just down the road from Ivansk. He

and his mother and older sister Mary sailed for Canada on the *Royal George*, which left from Avonmouth on September 6, 1913 and arrived at Quebec City on September 14, 1913. Their father had come to Canada earlier, as was often the case then. Two more children, Morris (always called Kip) and Irving were born in Canada. Our grandfather was Samuel (Shmuel) Kaplansky and he was born in Ivansk – we just learned that by a closer read of the family history done in the 1990s. Our father's mother was born Chanche Cukierman (Zuckerman or Sugerman in Canada). Her father had a flour mill in Rakow, and in Toronto she started the Health Bread Bakery.

Our mother's parents also came from Poland but we don't know where. Her father was Abraham Lehrer, her mother Rose or Ruth Birenzweig (she died very young, when my mother and her sister were not yet in school). They arrived in Toronto in 1913 and our mother, Helen, was born in 1914.



Rakow Jewish Cemetery, 1928

The Grave of Avraham (Avrom) Cukierman / Zuckerman

Avrom was our great-grandfather.

Gathered at his grave are members of the family.

- From Left to Right:
Chaya Cukierman
 (Terkeltauv; Avrom's widow),
Frieda Terkeltauv (Chaya's sister),
Blima Ejzycowicz
 (Avrom's daughter-in-law),
Shmul Zuckerman (Avrom's son)
Balche Zuckerman (Avrom's daughter)

Both matzevot "belong" to Avraham. The year of death is given as: 5676 (1915-1916).

In part the inscription indicates that Avraham was the son of Yehuda, a teacher and a rabbi.



**Getzel Kaplansky
 (Born in Rakow ~1850; died in Toronto 1925)**

This is our paternal great-grandfather, the father of Samuel (Shumel) Kaplansky. He and his wife, **Golde Tepperman** had 6 children. Deeply religious, Getzel was a Cohen (a priest) and a melamed (religious teacher) well versed in Babylonian Talmud. He served as a Chazzan (cantor) and Bal Koreh (Torah Reader) in Ivansk.

Golde was characterized as a strong-willed, "tough" lady who ran a baking business from their home. She died in Poland (date unknown).

In 1921, Getzel came to Toronto and lived with Samuel and Chanche above their grocery store on Gerrard Street.

Several of our Rakow grandmother's siblings came to Canada before World War II and others went to Argentina and Uruguay. As far as I know, only three family members survived the war in Europe, our father's first cousins, all young women. His cousin Nadya moved to California after a few years in Toronto. Cousin Manya stayed in Sweden where she had been given refuge after the war. The third cousin, Malka Nirenberg (née Owsiany) went to Argentina, where her father, brother and sister had emigrated before the war.



A Family Wedding ~1914

This wedding probably took place in Toronto.

Our paternal grandparents, **Samuel Kaplansky and Chanche (Zuckerman) Kaplansky** are standing at the right side of the photo.

Our father, **Max Kaplansky (Copeland)** and his sister, **Mary (Kaplansky) Freeman** are the children seated on the left side of the photo.

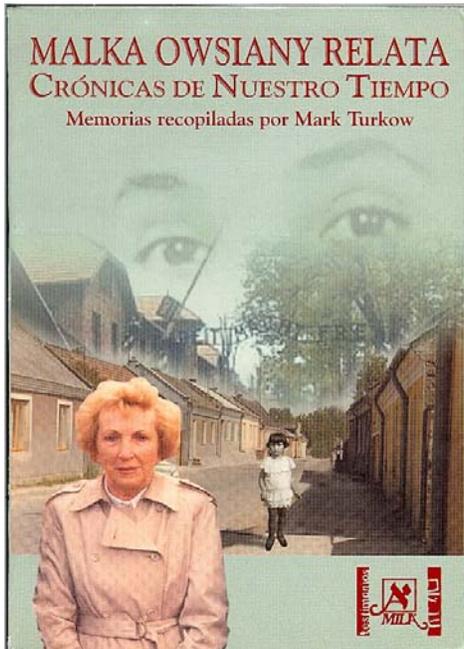
The other members in the wedding party are not known to us. Perhaps one of our readers may be able to help identify them.



**The Kaplanskys, 1919 or 1920
London or Toronto, Ontario**

Back Row, Left to Right:
Samuel (Shumel) Kaplansky
Max Kaplansky (Copeland)
Mary (Kaplansky) Freeman
Chanche (Zuckerman) Kaplansky

Front Row, Left to Right:
Irving Kaplansky
Morris (Kip) Kaplansky



Malka was the first Holocaust survivor to arrive in Argentina and there is a book about her wartime experiences, published in Yiddish in 1946 and republished in Spanish in 2001. (Owsiany, M., *Malka Owsiany Relata: Crónicas de Nuestro Tiempo*, *Memorias recopiladas por Mark Turkow*, [2001], Editorial Mila, Buenos Aires.)

Malka visited Poland several times with her husband Meir (from Lodz, also a Holocaust survivor) and their children. On their first visit to Rakow in 1985, Meir and Malka and their daughter Betty were walking down a street when they saw a man coming toward them, leading a cow.

As they got closer, he suddenly cried “*Malka du lebst!*” (Malka, you are alive!).

What a shock it must have been for all of them! Betty says her parents were literally speechless, unable to utter a word. But Betty answered in Yiddish, “Yes, this is my mother, this is Malka.”

The man with the cow had been a worker in the Cukierman family flour mill and had learned Yiddish there. More than 40 years after the Jews had been deported from Rakow, he recognized Malka and called out to her. Malka passed away a few years ago, but her children have kept in touch with that man’s family and we met with them when we were in Rakow.

Trying to Write about Our Trip I have been trying to write about our trip for months now, but only in my head. It wasn’t till mid-August that it started to finally come out on paper. I have spent most of my life writing, first in television news and then in communications, but I found this a tough story to tell. Because it is not about facts; it is about feelings, the connection to family and trying to understand your roots.

I decided that to tell the story of what we did, saw and felt in Poland, I also had to tell you the story of my family, who we are, where we came from, what we have become, where we have spread to. And so in early July, I wrote to as many of my family as I could (about 40 people in all – e-mail address books are good that way) so that I could include their voices too, and through them the voices of those who are no longer with us.

And they answered – from Belgium, Canada, the United States and Uruguay. And I am now working to weave together their replies, mostly about adapting to the new country, with things I found in the family history that help understand what life was like for the generations that came before us. I’ve tentatively titled that piece of writing *From the Old World to the New* and it will appear in a future issue of e-news.

Why We Went to Poland As Michael explained, the trip to Poland was really his idea. After I got settled in France, he called and said, “I would love to visit you but I don’t want to hang around Paris. How do you feel about going to Poland to visit the town where Max (our father) was born?” That sounded fine to me but it was easier said than done. Until we starting thinking about this trip, all I knew was the name of the town. Couldn’t spell it. Couldn’t pronounce it (it’s RAKUF). Didn’t really know where it was.

Then one day, our brother Paul got on a plane and serendipity kicked in. Here's his story:

On November 10, 2006 I was flying back from Ottawa after an appearance in the Federal Court of Canada on security certificate litigation. Earlier that day I had an opportunity to read the Globe and Mail¹ and glance through the Toronto Star. As I got on the Air Canada plane, they were giving out free copies of the National Post, a paper I seldom read. On the second page of the paper were two stories, one relating to the reopening of the synagogue in Munich 68 years after it had been destroyed by a Nazi mob, the other about Canadians helping to re-dedicate a Jewish cemetery in Ivansk, Poland. The article, by Tim Shufelt, started as follows:

"On October 13, 1942 most of the Jewish population of Ivansk, a small, poor city in southern Poland, gathered in a cemetery a few kilometres away. The neighbouring town of Rakov had just been overtaken by German forces and the Jews of Ivansk knew they were next."

I had never heard of the town of Ivansk but I knew my grandmother's family had operated a mill in Rakow. From the map that was with the story I saw in a general way that Ivansk was in the south-eastern corner of Poland. I read the article several times. It described in significant detail how the Jews of Ivansk had buried the sacred scrolls (Torahs) in the cemetery to try to make sure that they were not seized by the Germans. Sixty-four years later, the descendants of the Jews from Ivansk returned to rededicate the Jewish cemetery. I tore the page out of the newspaper and when I got home sent an e-mail to my extended family telling them about the article. My brother Michael followed up on the story and contacted Norton Taichman, who was named in the story.

And so, with much help from Norton Taichman and others involved in the Ivansk Project, Michael and I went to Poland in early May 2007, visiting Warsaw, Krakow, Ivansk, Rakow and other small towns.

A Paris Introduction to Jewish Life in Poland As I started making plans for our trip, I noticed a short item in the newspaper about some films being shown at the Shoah Memorial in Paris. By the time I saw the item, I had missed the first evening of films, which was about Jewish life in Poland before the war. But I made sure not to miss any others on the line-up. First, I saw *Mes Sept Mères* (My Seven Mothers), a film by French film-maker Joseph Morder about his mother and six of her friends, all from Radom. They survived the war, suffering enforced labour and concentration camps, and swore that they would always stay in touch. And so they did – from their homes in Canada, Ecuador, France, Israel and the United States. It is a wonderful, very touching film.

Imagine my surprise, as I sat in that hushed auditorium in the *Memorial de la Shoah* in Paris, to hear two of the women in the film explain how they found one another after the war – they were out for a walk on College Street in Toronto. I laughed out loud. They might have met right under my bedroom window. Because my baby and toddler years were spent on College Street, upstairs from the Health Bread Bakery, the business that my grandmother – a miller's daughter from Rakow – founded in 1928. The business that provided a solid living for her and three of her children over the next 50 years. More on that too in a future issue of e-news.

Then I saw *Dr. Korczak*, a film by Polish director Andrzej Wajda. Before I saw this film, I knew nothing about Dr. Janusz Korczak and his orphanage in the Warsaw ghetto, how he refused offers

¹ The *Globe and Mail*, *Toronto Star* and *National Post* are all major Canadian daily newspapers.

to save his own life and accompanied 200 Jewish orphans to Treblinka and extermination. I also saw *The Pianist*, with director Roman Polanski (himself a survivor of the Krakow ghetto) there to introduce his film.

Outside the Memorial stand walls inscribed with the names of “les deportés de France” – impressive solid granite covered with names of the deported, set out year by year. In almost every year, I found our family names ... Kaplansky, Cukierman/Zuckerman, Lehrer, Birenzweig. Deported from France, transported to the camps, often rooted out by French authorities. Later, at Paris City Hall, Michael and I went to an exhibit on “*les enfants déportés de France*”, photos and detailed information about French children and their families, all deported to concentration camps. Rooms and rooms of photos, names, addresses and personal details (also published in book form – many, many volumes). Here too we found our family names.

Also at the Shoah Memorial, an exhibit of documents from the Warsaw Ghetto – the Ringelblum Archives – on loan from the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw. Dr. Emanuel Ringelblum, a historian, in the midst of the horror that was the Warsaw ghetto, organized gathering of material and buried it in cellars. Dr. Ringelblum hid the documents in metal boxes and milk cans to preserve information about life in the Warsaw ghetto for future generations. In September, 1946, the metal boxes were discovered under the ruins of a house. In December, 1950, the milk cans with the second part of the archives were recovered.

Cmentarz Żydowski – Jewish Cemetery of Warsaw After arriving in Warsaw late on Saturday night, we spent a bright Sunday morning in the Jewish cemetery with Grzegorz (Greg) Gregorzcyk and his children. It is peaceful, overgrown, with winding alleys and drooping gravestones. The small stones left to honour the dead are often brightly coloured and painted with designs. But the cemetery is overlooked, overshadowed, with cranes just beyond the walls as Warsaw surrenders to a building frenzy – eastern European condos are advertised widely in Europe – speculation fever here now too.



I recognized the statue of Dr. Korczak with the children of the ghetto orphanage, holding hands and walking towards their death. And set into the cemetery wall, almost missed, a fragment of tombstone with a familiar name – Kaplanska – a young woman who died in 1917 at age 23. In Toronto when I was growing up, I knew no Kaplanskys other than my own family – my grandmother, aunts, uncles and first cousins – but here was another Kaplansky (well, a Kaplanska) on my first day in Poland.

Funny thing about the “sky” and “ska” at the end of Polish names. I knew that was the case for Polish colleagues and friends but it hadn’t occurred to me that it would have been the same for my own family. My Aunt Mary Freeman was definitely known as Mary Kaplansky when she was growing up in Toronto. But she managed to get her birth certificate from Poland in 1962, and on it she was registered as Kaplanska. Of course, you say, in Poland names ending in “sky” are always “ska” for women. But until I saw her birth certificate, just before we left for Poland, it never crossed my mind that such a convention would have applied to my family too. Which underlines for me just how little I (and probably many of us) know about such simple things that were part of everyday life for our grandparents and great-grandparents.

Visiting the Synagogue After the cemetery, Greg and his kids left us at the Nozyk Synagogue, an Orthodox Synagogue built by Zelman and Ryfka Nozyk between 1898 and 1902, the only Warsaw synagogue to survive the war. For me, who never goes to synagogue now and didn’t as a child either, it felt strange. Seeing one yarmulke with a URL on it (jewish.org.pl) and another with a

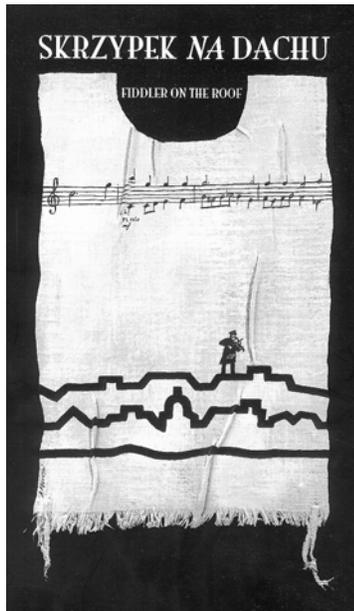
humorous smiley face and two hairclips still firmly attached, added to my sense of being out of place. This was very far from my synagogue experiences at friends' bar-mitzvahs in the late 1950s or at weddings in later years.

In the synagogue, we talked with a Jewish man in his 90s who had stayed in Poland after the war. Outside we talked to Rosa, probably in her 60s, a translator and interpreter, who had also stayed and told us the story of recently finding her father's grave after many years of searching. We chatted with the "replacement rabbi" (my term) who flies into Warsaw every so often to fill in when the Chief Rabbi of Poland, Michael Schudrich, heads back to the US. Though we didn't meet Rabbi Schudrich, I did hear an interview with him that I found fascinating. Knowing that I was going to Poland, my office-mate in Paris, an American, sent me this link to an interview with Rabbi Schudrich on National Public Radio, which I include so you can listen too:

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=9473085&sc=emaf>

(April 9, 2007) In Poland, a Jewish Renaissance: Guest host Dave Davies interviews Rabbi Michael Schudrich, chief rabbi of Poland – and a New York native. He moved to Warsaw in 1990 to help rebuild Jewish communities there. It was a homecoming of sorts: Schudrich's grandparents emigrated from Poland before World War II.

Warsaw – the Yiddish Theatre Walking from the synagogue towards the old city, as Michael explained, we noticed the Yiddish Theatre and went in to see what was playing. It was *Skrzypek Na Dachu*. A gentleman who said he would be attending the performance that night explained that it was *Fiddler on the Roof*. I asked him in what language and he told us it would be in Yiddish. The performance was sold out, but with the help of our new friend, we asked for standing room and were told to come back about 5:45 pm, just before the performance was to start.



When we got back, we were directed to a woman who was to show us where to stand. She told us that the show would be in Polish and was concerned that we wouldn't understand. I assured her that we both knew the songs by heart (I even know some of them in both French and English). With her help, our standing room turned into seats in the third row. It was a great performance, wonderful staging, acting and singing voices. But feeling like we might be the only Jews in the place, we both felt uncomfortable about the nasty non-Jews being portrayed on stage. How did the rest of the audience feel about this? Everyone certainly seemed to enjoy the performance.

Although this production was in Polish, most of what is produced here is in Yiddish. So where, oh where, do they find Yiddish speakers to perform in a theatre in Warsaw? I bought the programme to see if I could find out – at 10 zlotys (about \$4) a good deal compared to 10 euros (close to \$15) for a theatre programme in Paris. Well it turns out that they don't find Yiddish speakers at all, or hardly ever. The actors who perform here most often learn their lines phonetically in a language they do not speak or understand.

Ivansk and the Cemetery We arrived in Ivansk late on Monday afternoon to a warm welcome from Marco (Boussenna Mahfoud), who lives with his family in Ivansk and has been involved with the Ivansk Project. He came to meet us at the church and showed us the town and the restored cemetery. Around the town square sit houses built of squared wood beams, now resting uncomfortably on their foundations, having shifted over the years. They are probably modern and 21st century inside (more or less), but to me the old houses in Ivansk and Rakow look as if they

might have been there back in 1913 when two-year-old Max (our father) and his five-year-old sister Mary set off with their mother for the long trip to join their father in Canada.



Across the street, where the Ivansk synagogue stood is now the town's fire hall and community center. With Marco, we drove past the fire hall on ul. Rakowska (the Rakover Road), out of town towards the restored cemetery fanning out up the hill above us. Against the gray stormy sky, the gate and walls are an impressive sight as are the broken pieces of gravestones set in the wall. Somehow from reading the e-newsletters, I thought there would be more remnants of gravestones. But those that are there are beautiful.

Michael described himself as a secular Jew. Me too. There we were, two non-practising Jews with Marco, who is Muslim, walking in this beautiful peaceful restored Jewish cemetery. At the foot of the central monument we found a framed photo of the Virgin Mary with a bouquet of flowers. Who put it there and why? What to make of it? Would other Ivanskers be hurt by this? We talked about it with Marco and e-mailed Norton; we all agreed that it was intended as a gesture of respect and piety.

Rainbow over Rakow Our next stop was Rakow, and to get there we thought we would just continue along the road past the Ivansk Cemetery. It seemed logical – it is called ul. Rakowska (the road to Rakow). But Marco, our guide to Ivansk, and others he asked all said no, you can't get there that way, you have to go back to the highway. We knew it was only 10 or 15 km on the less travelled roads and so we persevered. Michael always figures he will find a way to get where he is going and he was right. There were even signposts for Rakow along the way. It seemed strange that in communities which were once so close – or so it seems from our own family history – that people now don't seem to know the quickest route between the two towns.

As I said, before we starting planning this trip, Rakow was a mystery to me, no idea what it might look like. Now we were headed there and when we arrived, believe it or not, there was a rainbow in the sky. I am not superstitious but it seemed a bit like an omen.

Talking Without Words In Rakow, we visited with the family of Wanda Lukasik, whose father had recognized Malka back in the 1980s. Michael has told the story of how we found their home and made arrangements to visit the next day.

They spoke little English. We spoke no Polish. Over coffee and pastries, we tried to communicate. You might say we talked without words, using drawings, the family tree we had brought and a copy of Malka's book, which contains pictures of Wanda and her family in Rakow with Malka and family.

Wanda's mother, now in her 80s, remembered Malka's mother Balche Owsiany (née Cukierman / Zuckerman) and told us how her family sheltered Balche in their basement. (Balche was later shot by the Nazis.) With Wanda and her husband Josef, we toured Rakow, seeing the house where Malka's mother was hidden, visiting the small memorial that marks the site of the Rakow Jewish cemetery and the site where the synagogue stood. Just as in Ivansk, the town's fire hall now stands on the site of the synagogue.

We didn't have a language in common, but we had smiles, we had warmth, we had my stick drawings to try to explain family relationships. And we had made a connection, in some small way, to a family that had ties to our family in this small Polish town so many years ago. Something I never thought I would be able to do.



Our Day in Rakow

- 1 A rainbow arches over the town square.
- 2 Josef, Susan and Michael on the deck overlooking Josef and Wanda Lukasik's garden.
- 3 Wanda and her mother examine Malka Owsiany's book about her experience during the Holocaust.
- 4 The house where Malka's mother, Balche was hidden in the cellar from the Nazis. Sadly, she did not survive the war.
- 5/6 The Rakow Jewish Cemetery...the marker and a symbolic wall are all that remain.

Courage and Resilience When I think of my grandmother (and her sisters and brothers) picking up and leaving home and family for a new life in a new land, where they didn't speak the language and had little or no money, I marvel at their courage and resilience.

I know they really had little choice – there was no future for them in Rakow, in Ivansk, in Poland. But it was so much harder then than it is now.

I have moved a lot myself. In my twenties, from Toronto to Montreal. In my forties with a family, from Montreal to Ottawa. In my late fifties, retired from one career (Canadian government) to a job in Paris for three years, with my husband in Ottawa and my kids in Montreal. It was sometimes tough to adjust, but I spoke the language (both of them, in fact), I had a job and a home, could phone or e-mail any time I wanted. They had only letters that took weeks or months to cross the Atlantic and then the war and no more letters.

How did they do it? How did they pick up and head out into the unknown as they did?

What courage it took for a young woman like Chanche Kaplansky to cross the Atlantic alone with two young children, to join her husband who had been gone for a year – especially, when, as appears to be the case, she had serious misgivings about her marriage.

My grandmother was a very special lady. Strong. Determined. She made it in this new world. She left her mark. When her husband was unable to earn a living, she started a business. After he died in 1942, she built up that business with three of her children and it supported the family for 50 years. As I have said, that business, Toronto's Health Bread Bakery, had its roots in Poland, in our great-grandfather's flour mill in Rakow.



Avrom and Chaya Cukierman

From Then to Now Our great-grandparents Avrom Cukierman (1855-1916) and Chaya Terkeltau (1858-1942) married in 1871, when he was 16 and she was 13. They had 13 children. Some died young; some were murdered by the Nazis. But from the tiny shtetl of Rakow, their descendants have spread around the world, living now in Argentina, Belgium, Canada, France, Israel, Sweden, the United States, Uruguay and probably elsewhere too. That is quite a legacy. Many of us came together at a Cukierman Family Reunion held in Toronto in 2003 and e-mail helps us keep in touch.

Our bubu, Anna (Chanche) Kaplansky, died in 1972. Her four children and son-in-law are now gone too – Mary's husband Mike Freeman in 1980, Max in 1988, Mary in 1997, Kip in 2003 and Irving in 2006. But as I write these lines, we are lucky to still have with us our mother Helen Copeland and aunts Mucie (Kip's widow) Kaplansky and Chellie Kaplansky (Irving's widow).

Recently I came across the university graduation photo I gave to my grandmother in 1968. I had inscribed it with the words: "Dear Bubu, I hope you are as proud of me as I am of you." I am also extremely proud to be part of this huge extended family. And very grateful that my "big brother" Michael and I were able to make this trip together.

The “Business” of Jewish Heritage

A week is a very short visit from which to draw conclusions but there is clearly a growing interest in Poland's Jewish history and heritage. Friends and relatives have sent me articles from *The New York Times* and *Newsweek* and told me about Jewish heritage tours.

This has led to some wonderful things, such as the annual Jewish film festival, *Żydowskie Motywy Międzynarodowy Festiwal Filmowy* (Jewish Motifs International Film Festival). Through the art of cinema, they aim to “awaken the audience's interest in topics related to Jewish identity and experience throughout history, to the preservation of Jewish culture and tradition as a source of Judeo-Christian civilization ... and find ways of communicating with all religious, national and cultural communities in order to better know each other and better understand their diverse motives”. This year's festival started the day we left Poland, so we couldn't go, but I have next year's dates on my calendar – April 22 to 27, 2008 (for details, www.jewishmotifs.org).



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And it's led to some amusing things too, like the “Cymes” Restaurant in Chmielnik. We were intrigued by a sign at the synagogue in Szydłow advertising this place as offering Jewish food. When we got there, they did have a small yellow Jewish menu in English, printed on a bright yellow business card.

I like Jewish food. In fact I sort of define my Jewish identity as culinary more than anything else. I don't know what pipki are (maybe I should) but I wouldn't have minded some goose – or even gouse – if it had been available. But after discussion with the cook, we ended up with the beef soup which was quite good and pierogis, also quite good, but served with little bits of bacon on top. So much for traditional Jewish cuisine, spelling mistakes or not! But the food was actually okay and they are trying. Their website, all in Polish, is at: www.restauracjacymes.com.

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The New York Times article (*In Poland, a Jewish Revival Thrives – Minus Jews*, July 12, 2007), describes many other examples of how “Jewish culture is beginning to flourish again” – restaurants, festivals, summer camps, schools, concerts, lectures and workshops. It also describes a short stretch of street in Krakow that we visited too, which features mock-ups of old Jewish shops and signs designed to give a feel for what the neighbourhood might have looked like before the war. Charming in a way, but a bit commercial for my taste.

I'm not sure how I feel about this growing interest in things Jewish in Poland. As I said, I wasn't there long enough to draw any conclusions. All I can say is that part of me wondered if some things might be exploitation for profit, but most of me was very pleased to see this acknowledgement of what used to be – for centuries.

continued next page

IVANSK HUMOR

by Albert P. Roberts

Broomall, Pennsylvania, USA

The Cholent

Shmuel from Ivansk is on his death bed. He's been in a deep coma for days and it is clear the end is near. He has been a loving husband, a devoted father and a dedicated member of the shul. The family is gathered, tearfully anticipating his demise. Suddenly, Shmuel opens first one eye, then the other, then wiggles his nose. He turns his head to locate his wife Surah at his bedside.

"Is that a cholent in the oven that I am smelling?" he asks.

"Yes, it is, my darling beloved", she replies.

"Maybe I could have a little bit of it before I go", he says with a sigh.

"Certainly not ", says Surah - "it's for the shiva!"



Three Jews; A Ivansker, A Lagover and A Stashover

Three itinerant Yiddishe peddlers from neighboring towns meet somewhere on the road to Apt on their way home for the High Holidays. They begin bragging about how religious the landsleit are in their respective communities.

The Jew from Staszow says: "Where I come from, on Yom Kippur at least 90% of the Yidden in my town are davening and schokling in shul."

The Jew from Lagov says, "That's all? In Lagov certainly no less than 95%, maybe even 98% are in shul!"

The Ivansker shakes his head: "Gentlemen, Gentlemen, I must tell you that in Ivansk there is such profound reverence for the solemnity of the occasion that we bolt the door to the shul and put up a sign saying, 'Closed For The Holiday'."

Sha, Shtil, Der Rebbe Schloft (Quiet, The Rabbi Sleeps)

One warm summer afternoon, the Ivansker rebbe slips off to sleep in the middle of teaching a cheder class. As he sleeps, his students begin to extol his many attributes and virtues.

"He probably has fallen asleep because he was awake half the night praying...who is the equal of our rebbe in piety? There is no one!" says one student, his eyes watering.

"And his piety is perhaps only exceeded by his knowledge...if all of our holy texts were lost in a fire, our rebbe could reconstruct them from memory." says another one of his devoted students.

"His generosity is known to all...he has very little money himself, yet he always gives to the poor, always has a few zlotys for someone who comes to him in need...no one ever leaves empty handed." observes a third.

Then there's a pause in the encomiums.....

The rebbe opens an eye and murmurs:

"His Modesty! His Modesty! - I haven't heard a word about his modesty!"

Should be Lots of Bread on the Table

This Ivansker, known for his hearty appetite, tries out a new Jewish delicatessen.

When he finishes his meal, the owner comes up to the table, "Nu, so how was the food?"

The Ivansker replies: "The food was alright but on the table wasn't enough bread."

The owner looks down at the bread basket; to his amazement, every piece of rye, pumpernickel, onion roll, bialy, saltstick, kaiser roll has been consumed. Not a crumb remains.

"Come back tomorrow. I promise we'll fix it." says the owner to the fresser from Ivansk.

"Vel, maybe; I'll think about it", shrugs the fresser but does not commit himself.

Nevertheless, the next day the Ivansker walks through the door, sits down and the owner brings out not one but two baskets filled with rye bread (with and without *kimme!*), pumpernickel, cornbread, bagels, bialys, saltsticks, kaiser rolls, and half a challah.

The fresser fresses and when he's finished the owner inquires, "Nu, so now how everything was?"

Says the angry Ivansker, "Look buddy, I thought I made it clear. I'm a big bread eater. To me, *broit* (bread) is the staff of life...on the table was not enough broit!"

The owner looks down and again sees both baskets empty; every single piece of bread, every poppy seed, every bit of onion, every caraway seed – everything is all gone.

The owner pleads for another chance: "Look, come back tomorrow; for sure everything to satisfy you."

So the next afternoon the Ivansker is back again, sits down by the window table and orders lunch.

The cook has been instructed to take a three-foot-long loaf of rye bread, cut it length-wise and pile on corned beef, pastrami, wurst, brisket and tongue (dill pickles, dill tomatoes and coleslaw heaped on the side).

From a distance the owner watches the Ivansker consume the entire meal...not a drop of anything is left.

Filled with a new sense of confidence the owner comes over, "Nu, so now how it was today?"

Bristling the Ivansker replies, "HOW COME TODAY YOU'RE BACK TO TWO SLICES BREAD?!"

It's All In The Bible! Comedian Red Buttons -- Last Performance!

Every year Jerry Lewis hosts a telethon to raise money to support the Muscular Dystrophy Association. Numerous guest comedians appear on the show. Red Buttons (1919-2006) had a long career in show business. He gave his last performance on the MDA Telethon in 2003.

I don't know if Red Buttons was an Ivansker, but for sure he had an Ivansker's sense of humor. Click on the link below and be prepared to laugh out loud (CTRL + left click):

> http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sEE_mpWRFt8 <

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