

**Refugee Stories
of the Congregants of
Congregation Beth El of the Sudbury River Vally
7 Nisan 5781/20 March 2021 - 4 Sivan 5781/15 May 2021**

Introduction

To support HIAS's Refugee Weekend, the Sanctuary Committee planned and conducted a series of programs and events and solicited the Refugee Stories of our fellow congregants, who would then present their stories during Shabbat services. We expected just a few stories, enough to bring Beth El into the theme and spirit of Refugee Weekend. The congregation responded with more than 30 stories — way more than could be presented during one Shabbat. So, following Rabbi Breindel's teaching that the times of Passover and the counting of the Omer are about the Jewish people being refugees, their presentations began during Refugee Weekend on March 20 and continued into Passover and through the end of the counting on the Omer on May 15. This document is the compilation of all of the stories, the Refugee Stories of Congregation Beth El.

Paula Adelson

When Bill Adelson's mother, Julia, escaped from White Russia, she almost didn't make it. Julia was a respected pharmacist, but when life there became intolerable, she decided she had to leave. As she was approaching the border, she recognized one of the guards as her neighbor. If he recognized her, she would be sent back. So her friends tied a babushka over her head, defiantly asserted that she was both deaf and dumb, and she made it through to the U.S.fortunately, for Bill and his sister, Ricki, and for me!

Jocelyn Bailin

My paternal grandfather, Herschel/Harry came to the US as a refugee, fleeing pogroms in what was then Russia. He, his parents, and nine siblings arrived through Ellis Island in 1910 when he was 17. He held several jobs during the family's brief stay in New York City, including selling apples on the street! The family quickly relocated to Sioux City Iowa, probably joining other relatives who were already there.

Despite a classical education as a cantor back in Russia, my grandfather (who was fluent in seven languages), was determined to assimilate and worked hard to lose his accent. His two older brothers started "Bailin Brothers", a dry goods store with locations in Iowa and Nebraska. My grandfather joined them after a few years, and successfully ran the business after both brothers died young, supporting not only his own family but their families as well.

Harry adamantly refused to speak of his experiences in "the old country." He also never openly practiced his Judaism, though he never disavowed it, either.

Stephen Balzac

My mother's family fled Russia for the United States in the late 19th century. My grandmother was born on the ship during the journey. The story I always heard as a child was that my mother's maternal grandfather (my great-grandfather), his brother, and their families, all arrived at Ellis Island with the same last name. When they finished coming through immigration, they had different names, none of which was their actual name. (I doubt very much it happened exactly as they described, but I imagine a vivid version of that scene.)

My mother's father came to the US after fleeing from Ukraine to Argentina. That gave the family more flexibility around immigration. My maternal grandfather started as Isaac Adrochinsky (the spelling is not verified). He was a young boy when he arrived in New York with his parents, and by then, the family name was Adrian. My grandmother said they didn't want to keep "Adrochinsky" because it sounded too foreign, so they renamed themselves after a famous Russian general whose name, "Adrian," had a similar meaning to Adrochinsky. It let them keep a Russian name without sounding Russian. At some point, my grandfather also acquired the first name, "Allen," which he used for the rest of his life.

Elaine Barnartt-Goldstein

Thank you, Adoshem, for allowing me to be born on this continent. My mother, Lottie (Fox) Barnartt, came from Ozarow, Poland, to Toronto, Canada. When asked why the family left, she looked shocked and said, “Because we could!” They would have gone to the U. S., but they did not fit into the quota. You have guided my family to safety.

Rebecca Berkowitz

My mother was one of five children born in Montreal, Canada, to Eastern European Jewish immigrants. After her brother Bernie was diagnosed with tuberculosis, the family decided to relocate to New York City because my grandmother had heard good medical treatment was available there. They came by train, circa 1920. Uncle Bernie eventually studied dentistry at Columbia, served in Europe, and died at the ripe old age of 93.

Jane Brauer

My maternal grandfather, Meyer Lubchanski, left his home of Grodna, Russia, at the age of 13 to escape the pogroms. He was one of four brothers and three sisters, although he traveled on his own, arriving at Ellis Island in 1903. His last name at that time was shortened to Lubow. He settled in NYC, most likely with a cousin, and became a paper boy. “Pay Pee, Pay Pee, Get your Pay pee” was the first thing he learned to say. Meyer worked during the days and studied English at night. He became fluent, with a wonderful accent.

As he grew older, he worked as a pants cutter in a clothing factory, where he met Vera Lubalin, also a Russian immigrant. They married, and in 1925 gave birth to their only child, my mother, Harriet.

During this time, a wealthy man named Ben Cohen who wanted to begin a chain of clothing stores, noticed how hard my grandfather Meyer worked, and asked him to join in this endeavor, running a men’s clothing business - “Dundee Clothing – Factory to You!” featuring the factory upstairs, and a retail store downstairs. The first store opened in Allentown, Pa; my grandparents and my Mom moved to Allentown in 1930, when she was 5. Over time, there were 50 Dundee Stores set up nationwide.

Papa had become successful, yet as a Jew in Allentown, at that time, he faced many restrictions. In order to have a community and a social life, he and four other people founded Temple Beth El, a conservative shul in Allentown. As a youngster, I sat by my papa’s side on Friday nights, learning the words as he pointed them out to me. My papa gave me my love of Judaism.



Martin Brauer

Both my parents came from Breslau, Germany (now Wroclaw, Poland), which had a large Jewish population. Separately, both chose to leave Hitler's Germany. With assistance from British Jewish Organizations such as the Jewish Refugee Committee, each of them settled in England. By coincidence, both ended up in the northeast of England, near Durham, and each was able to bring their parents to the area before Britain declared war in 1939.

My family suffered because of Hitler. My dad's father was briefly held in Buchenwald after Kristallnacht (1938), which apparently was a factor in his early death. My mother's brother was one of the earliest victims of Nazi gangs. In addition, because Britain considered them to be "aliens," both my dad and my dad's father were briefly interned in a camp on the Isle of Man.

My dad, an MD in Germany, had to requalify as a doctor ("general practitioner") to practice in England. My mother learned shorthand, so that she could work as a secretary. My mother found employment at a refugee-owned clothing factory in West Auckland, while my dad found a medical practice in a neighboring town, Spennymoor. Within the small refugee community, it was almost inevitable that they would find each other. They met and married in 1945, settling in Spennymoor. My sister was born in 1946 and I was born a few years later. Sadly, my grandparents all passed away while I was quite young, so I have few memories of them.

We were the only Jewish family in Spennymoor, but we never experienced antisemitism, only curiosity. The nearest synagogue was a conservative shul in Newcastle, 20 miles away. We attended High Holiday services there and that's where I was Bar Mitzvah'ed. We celebrated Passover and Chanukah at home. Once I left for university, where Jews were also a small minority, I drifted away from Jewish practices.

During my career I worked for Digital Equipment Corporation (DEC) in Reading, Berkshire, and in 1985 was happy to accept a short-term assignment in MA, knowing I had the family in NJ. A few months into this assignment, I was introduced to Jane, who was a friend of a colleague's wife. Our first "date" was a Beth El event. Although I returned to my job in England in October 1985, our relationship continued remotely (pre-Internet!), although with some in-person visits. We were married in 1986 at Beth El (Where else?). My father attended the wedding with my step mother, as my mother had passed many years earlier. He never lost his German accent.

Louise Brown

My grandfather, Sam, was a young man living with his large family in a shtetl in Lithuania. His older brother, who was given a ticket on a ship traveling to the US, could not use it at the time, as he was involved in a love affair. He handed that ticket over to Sam, and that is how my zady arrived here first, eventually joined by five sisters and a younger brother. They all married, worked hard in the new world, and achieved the Jewish version of the American dream. Unfortunately, the other brother and his family were lost in the Holocaust.

Barry David

This is a picture of my mother's family. Grandpa Emile Weinberger (note the Austrian mustache, proudly worn) immigrated in 1910 from the Vienna area, where his family had owned a modest vineyard. Nana Rose Klein came from Budapest area. They met in Boston, married, and raised their family. They struggled financially. They were Orthodox; they followed Torah. They spoke Yiddish, Hungarian, Austiran/German, and some English. They were "fruitful and multiplied." My mother is their only girl. One young brother died; there were seven other brothers. America thus birthed a first generation of Weinbergers. The boys did eventually change their names as so many Jews did in order to become accepted.



Rose and Emile's children became a doctor, a dentist, a real estate developer, a business man, a set designer in Hollywood, an oral surgeon, and an academic/headmaster. My mom became a dental hygienist. She was going to pursue an occupation, though this was not considered exactly "kosher" for a female of that time. Her brothers convinced their parents that it was okay, here in America, for a woman to have a career. Emile and Rose did not speak much English; they were just a couple of young Jews from Europe, escaping persecution, seeking opportunity and the freedom to practice their religion, trying to make a living and raise a family.

My paternal grandparents could not enter the US in the late 1880's, so they went to Canada, settling in Montreal. They eventually came to the US with my dad and his sisters. More stories than my finger can count for now.

This is the family, circa 1910.

Debbie Falck

In 1938, when my mother was 9, the Nazis had confiscated my grandfather's business, taken their home, and were beating the Jewish men. My normally soft-spoken grandmother said, "Enough!" and wrote to distant cousins in America, asking for an affidavit. My mother and her parents left their community in northern Germany, taking a ship to NY and arriving in Cleveland, Ohio.

Once in the US, my grandfather tried to help his family back in Europe, but he was mostly unsuccessful; his father died in Theresienstadt, and the rest of the family went to the Warsaw Ghetto. My grandmother's relatives emigrated to Johannesburg, South Africa. She and her sister wrote to each other faithfully, but never saw each other again.

Yom Kippur of 1939, Hamburg, Germany. My father, age 16, his two younger brothers, and their parents broke the fast and set out for the train station, the start of a harrowing journey which ultimately took them to New York and then Cleveland, Ohio. As with my mother's family, most everyone left behind died in concentration camps and ghettos.

Some years later my parents met and married. They took every opportunity to become well educated, contributing members of society. Deeply observant Jews, my parents and grandparents became proud, informed and profoundly grateful US citizens.

Cindy Fox

Twenty six years ago, on the occasion of his Bar Mitzvah, we presented my son Hal with a tallit from his great grandfather, my grandfather. The tallit was a family heirloom. My grandfather was the last in the family to have it and use it. Years earlier, when he died, one of my regrets was that I had neglected to have him write down the history of his tallit, but one of my cousins created a website about our family, malerman.com. Browsing this site, I got a hint about the history of my grandfather's tallit on a page from Who's Who in Philadelphia Jewry about our great-great grandfather (my grandfather's father) Shmu'el Malerman.

“Born in Tomashev, Poland in 1869, the son of Moshe Nachman and Chaye Pearl Malerman, a distinguished family of Chasidim and learned men. Young Malerman was kept at the Yeshiva in Usyatin (also Husyatin) until he married. He was also educated in the Russian and Polish languages. Arriving in the United States in 1911, his greatest problem in life was how to support his family so that he should not have to work on the Sabbath day. Upon the advice of his friends, he opened a Jewish book store, dealing in religious books and thus managed all of this life to live up to his customers' religion and orthodox traditions as he would in the old country.”

Shmu'el Malerman came to America to escape the pogroms, the forced military conscription in Poland, and economic challenges. His family of eleven, including nine children, were sent on this journey. Three of his teenagers were the first to come over in 1905. He followed in 1911 with his wife (and my great, great grandmother) Rachel and their remaining six children.

That night, after reading about my great, great grandfather, I woke abruptly to sounds of loud clanging. “Work and Torah” I sleepily thought; I bet this was the hour that he woke to start his day, davening when the sun rose and getting ready for work. Of course he would wrap himself in his tallit to daven. If it had not been for being abruptly startled wide awake at that hour, I might not have remembered this dream, but WHAT A DREAM!

... I was in an old theater to help the director with a play that had a Jewish theme. As part of the play, I was supposed to show the cast members how to put on a tallit. “I can't do that,” I said to the faceless director. “I've NEVER worn a tallit. And besides, my Hebrew isn't that great either.”

Cindy Fox (cont.)

“Cindy you’ll have to do it” was the terse reply. “I need you to help. Go see what you can find in the prop room.” And I was dismissed. The prop room was filled with dusty, dingy costumes, trunks, furniture, with a little window in the corner. A beam of sunlight filtered through the filthy window to spotlight something there on a chair that caught my eye. There was a bright white....tallit. As I picked it up, I thought to myself “Oh great, I found a tallit... And with panic rising in my throat, now what am I going to do!?”

Suddenly (as luck and dreams would have it!), Pam McArthur (Yes, that Pam McArthur) appeared to show me how to teach the ritual to the cast members. She patiently showed me how. She unfolded the tallit, kissed the collar and placed it over her head enclosing herself in its wings. “This garment wraps us in sacred time and space... of remembering, of righteousness, and of responsibility.”

I replied, “But how will I remember the prayer that you have to say before you put it on.” She showed me that the blessing was right on my tallit. And I said “But I thought the prayer was l’hitah’tafe b’tsitsit.”

“That’s true too.” she said, “You can say either. But it’s right here. Look right here on the collar of your tallit it says zacher tzadik l’vracha.”

It was at that moment that I WOKE UP and realized that the tallit in my story was my great, great grandfather’s from Tomashev, Poland, worn when he went to the Yeshiva at Husyatin, and it was sitting in my son’s room. A gift from his great-grandfather of blessed memory. Waiting to wrap him in sacred time and space, given in chochmae lav... in love... a cherished link for him to wear to generations past.

My mother recently gave me my own tallit. I can’t wait to wrap myself in its sacred time and sacred space, also given with love, a cherished link to wear now and for generations future.

Zacher tzadik l’vracha -- The memory of the righteous is a blessing.

Michael Gevelber

My mom, Juci Spiegel-Strauss, grew up in a thatched-roof farmhouse in the foothills of the Velky Tatras—the high mountains of Czechoslovakia. It was idyllic. She told stories of growing up on the farm with her pet chicken, Stek Stek Stekala, and of cross country skiing across the fields. She was the country girl and loved when her big city cousins (Dita, Magda, and Agi) came to visit during the summer. But she experienced, first hand, the hatred among the different communities in Slovakia, a hatred that exists to this day.

During the war, she was captured by the Wehrmacht when hiking down from the family's mountain hiding place to get food, and sent to Ravensbruck concentration camp. The cruelty of fate was that being captured saved her life since the family was murdered by local villagers. My mom said what kept her alive in Ravensbruck was the belief she needed to stay alive to rejoin her family after the war. She said that if one gave up hope, people died the next day.



Toddler Juci with mother front steps of farm house Slovenska Ves



Juci, left, with big city cousins Magda and Dita



Four generations of my mother's mother's side of the family (Haas-Steinhardt)

Michael Gevelber (cont.)

I'm envious of the family life she had before the war. In the photo at the right on the previous slide, my mom is surrounded by three generations on her maternal side. This contrasts with how I grew up, having only one grandparent who passed away when I was young. In our house, anyone who was distantly related, and even just a family friend, was considered to be family.

My mom left Czechoslovakia in 1948, two months after the Communists took over, right before the border slammed shut. It was hard for her to leave her home country, and she had turned down several visa's sent from an American relative. She made her way on her own to Cleveland, leaving her family in Baltimore since they were too controlling.

If you had met her, you probably would not have realized the grit, determination, and love of life that this slight, demure woman had. Her closest group of friends was a group of survivors, whom I think that most Americans could not really understand.

My mother loved being an American, but she was European at heart. She spoke five languages; what a cacophony of sound ensued when the family got together! We took our first family trip to Czechoslovakia and Israel in 1966, and mom was reunited with those she loved for the first time in 16 years. I later learned that, after putting us kids to bed, she snuck down to the street to check out the vendors who called out "Pivo, horky parky, cherna cava, cokolada!" (Beer, hot dogs, coffee, chocolate).

My mom's values live on through me: the importance of family, helping out those who are in need, the joy of traveling, and having a broad view of the world, but unfortunately, not her ability to be a polyglot.

Gary Girzon

My family left Lithuania (a part of the Soviet Union) when I was 10 years old as part of the first wave of emigration from Soviet Union to Israel in the early '70s. Instead of going to Israel and joining much of our family, my parents, now in Vienna, declared they wanted to go to Canada to join my dad's brother and other family. We then became “stateless,” and lived in Italy with other Soviet refugees applying to Canada, US, and Australia. HIAS (or JIAS and JDC or "Joint") provided support, like a stipend for rent, and education.

As a child, it was hard, but an adventure - living by the ocean, learning English from American volunteers in Rome, and touring museums, and travelling on the cheap to places all over Italy for a couple of weeks.

After 4 months, we finally arrived in Montreal, where I grew up. Eventually I made it to Boston for graduate school, met my wife Carrie, and raised our kids, Ben and Maya, here.

Sheila Goldberg

My grandfather, Morduch Krugman, left Bialystok for America in September, 1912, six months before my mother was born. I have no record of when my grandmother joined him. In 1920, my mother, her sisters and her grandmother came to America via England. While in England they stayed with my grandmother's first cousin, the noted Yiddish writer, Israel Zangwill. From there they went in steerage to Ellis Island where she saw her father for the first time. They left Bialystok because of the Pogroms and to make a better life.

Judy Gross

Both sets of grandparents came from Russia - Ukraine and Vilna.

My maternal grandfather came to America with his twin brother at the age of 15 in the late 1880's. When they arrived at Ellis Island, the officials could not pronounce his last name, Fernefsky. Thus, the name was changed to Dondis. Grampy settled in Fall River and had an open vegetable and fruit market. He owned his tenement house, residing on the third floor with their eight children. My grandparents also 'adopted' more children. He enjoyed reading The Forward (Jewish newspaper) and drinking tea from a glass. Grammy could be found in the kitchen, cooking in their Kosher home.



My paternal grandfather also moved to America in the late 1880's. He settled on a small island, Vinalhaven, off the coast of Rockland, Maine, and later moved to the mainland in Rockland, where he owned a first-class men's clothing store. He and my grandmother had three children. In 1918 my grandmother succumbed to the Spanish flu. My Dad was only nine and had two younger sisters.

We have both grandfathers' citizenship papers framed in our library. My sons visited Ellis Island with Hebrew school; they rubbed our grandparents' names from the MANY other names on the walls there.

Linda Hirsch

Shifra's Journey: My maternal grandmother, Nana Ida (Bornstein), was born in Vilna, the youngest of three sisters and one brother. After their father had died of cholera in Russia, their mother, Shifra Beryl (Sarah) left her children with her parents and in-laws, and travelled by Siberian train, along the Silk Road, across Russia, possibly with a man with whom she had fallen in love. My maternal grandmother and her siblings would eventually move to America.

Shifra, meanwhile, had lived in Harbin, China and then in Shanghai, where, eventually, a family member found her through *Der Tog*, a Jewish newspaper, and brought her to live in the Boston area.

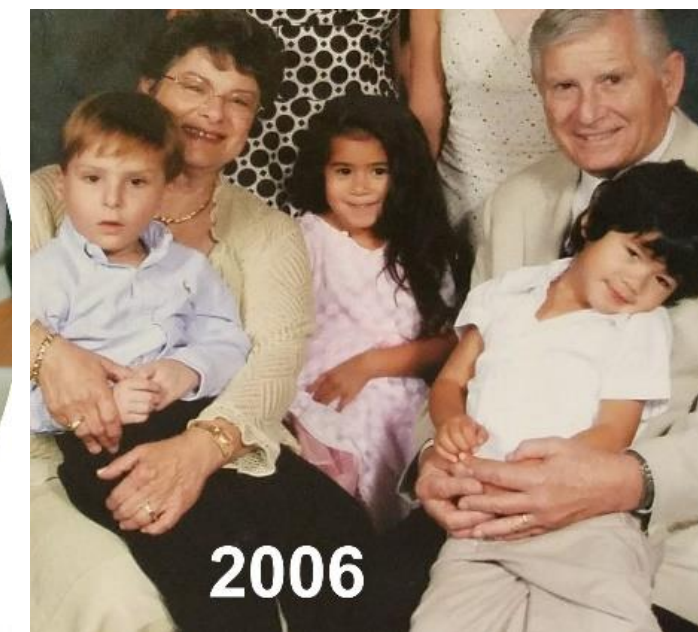
Shifra was a restless, active woman; she lived with each of her 3 daughters, and was buried in Woburn. Differing family accounts say that she died in her 80's or lived to exceed 100. Her influence has manifested in my love for cinema, Asian art, and artifacts, which permeated our home and lives, eventually leading to my interest in Mindfulness Meditation and Tibetan Buddhism.

Bernie Horn

In the 1920's and 1930's, my parents emigrated from Poland and Russia to join their respective families in Winnipeg, Manitoba. My mother's father and grandfather had been murdered in the pogroms of 1918; my father would lose a sister, a brother, a sister-in-law, and two nephews in the Shoah. In Winnipeg, my parents met, married, and, in 1938, had my big brother.

In 1941, before the US entered World War II, the family decided to emigrate to New York. Since my father was still on his Polish passport, there were no slots for immigration to the US. But at my parents' interview, the US Consul in Winnipeg somehow, as my father put it, "took to" the young family and let them in. As my father's passport shows, they crossed into the US in North Dakota.

Journey of Refugee & Holocaust Survivor Pauline Heisler Kaner



- 1937** Born in Berlin to David & Antonia **1938** Jewish men rounded up, David → Poland, family followed
- 1939** War, David → military duty in the Polish army, Jews → ghetto or countryside
- 1940** Fled from town to town in Poland, ultimately no village safe
- 1942** → hiding – hole in the ground under a barn with help from a Polish farmer's wife
- 1945** Liberated by the Russian army, left Poland; 6 DP camps (Czech., Austria, Germany)
- 1947** Germany → NYC by cargo ship **1949** → Detroit (later retired & moved to L.A.)



- Married, 3 children, 2 college degrees, 3 grands – including Alex
- Only 8 survivors (out of 20)
- Documented accounts by older sister Aline @ Holocaust Memorial Center
- Righteous Gentiles listed in the Shindler Museum & at Yad Vashem

Ann Klein and Gena Blinderman

Our maternal grandfather, Isadore Podberesky, came from Vilna. He was a young violinist who had studied with the same teacher as Yasha Heifetz; he remembered Heifetz as a little boy with long blonde curls. He told us he also attended the czar's music academy, where he wore a uniform. He came to the United States alone in 1911 to join his siblings. On the ship crossing the Atlantic, his violin was stolen. There were too many violinists in New York, so he took up cello and banjo as well. He enlisted in the army in World War I, playing in the military orchestra. After marrying Anna Frankel, they moved to her hometown of Bethlehem, PA, where they opened a clothing store. He continued to play in orchestras and chamber groups, but when I was growing up, he was primarily a cello teacher.

Our paternal grandfather, Harry Blinderman, came from Odessa. When he came to the U.S. around the turn of the century/early 1900's, he was sponsored by a movement that sent many young Jewish immigrants to homestead in North Dakota. He returned east, married Bessie Gurefsky, and lived in New York until one of his sons was run over and killed by a wagon. The family moved to a farm in the Lehigh Valley, where our father, Marty, was born and raised. Life was very hard during the Depression, but the NYC relatives loved visiting their country cousins in the summer. After WWII, Harry and Marty started a scrap metals business together. The farm was sold and eventually became Lehigh University's athletic field.

Druh Kolyr

My great grandmother and her sister were onboard a ship coming from England in the late 1800's. A storm swell broke over the deck, almost washing my great-aunt off, but her older sister grabbed her and kept her safe.

Judith Lytel

My daughters, Anna and Jennie, were adopted from China as infants. Lorel officiated at Anna's naming ceremony, which we held at our home. We said, in part:

"We recognize that this baby has a dual heritage and hope to honor both in her life with us. Anna, you are named for two very special people; both of your maternal grandmothers were Annas, and were immigrants to this country as you are.

We hope to provide you with some of the rich heritage they shared with each of us, while also preserving your link to China in your middle name, ChunQin. For your Hebrew name, we chose Hannah for your grandmothers, and Aviva to honor your Chinese name, which means Spring music, for the hope and joy the name conveys.



May you always find all the love, acceptance, and freedom to be all of who you are, that your mothers have found at Beth El amidst this loving community. And may having two Jewish mothers always be more of a blessing than a curse."

As for our Russian heritage, whenever I asked my Baubee (Anna) to tell me about Russia, her reply was always the same: "The old country. FEH!" Literally, that was it.

An interesting "small world" note: those unrelated grandmothers, both named Anna (and each of whom married a Harry, to our daughters' delight!), lived literally one block apart in Philadelphia! We were visiting my ex's family when, in retelling a family story, I mentioned that the street on which my Baubee lived had stone steps leading to the street where the trolley ran. My ex's Gram said, "I know that street, it's Champlost, where did she live?" I said 17th, and she said, "We lived at 18th and Champlost. What was her name?" "Anna Black," to which Gram replied almost off-handedly, "Oh, I knew her. She was a seamstress." We all went to the same dentist; his office was on the corner between 17th and 18th!

Thomas Michel

I am the son of an illegal immigrant. My mother, Johanna Waldbaum, escaped from Nazi Austria in late 1941 at the age of 19, using false papers that were provided to her by a sympathetic consular official at the American Embassy in Vienna. She was one of a handful of refugees on the steamship from Lisbon who were allowed into the US; the rest were sent back to Nazi-occupied Europe.

The first name of the consular official who helped her was Thomas: he is my namesake. To her dying day, she never registered to vote, never got a passport or a driver's license, long after her fear of deportation seemed to have any rational basis. But when we look at what happened to illegal immigrants in the last Administration, perhaps her fears were justified.



Ruth Natanson

My maternal grandparents, Maurice and Annie Victor, came to Boston from Lodz and Kiev in the early 1900s because of antisemitism and a hard life. My grandfather's first wife had died; he met Annie in Boston and they married in 1910. He was a baker and then became a bondsman. He also helped found the North Russell Street Synagogue (in the West End), next door to his apartment building, which is now the Charles River Synagogue.

My paternal grandparents, Rebecca Stanetsky and Max Woronoff, were already married with several children when they came from Riga in Russia to Boston. They had been confined to a ghetto area called the Pale of Settlement, so they came here for a better life and lived in the West End of Boston near MGH, and ran a dry goods store.

Both my parents were born here in the US - first generation Americans.

Elsie Navisky

Leaving Cairo, Egypt in 1966 at the age of 16.

Uncertain, fearful, not speaking the language properly, not sure if there'll be enough money for food, a place to live. Not knowing anything at all.

Hopeful for acceptance and willing to work hard to succeed in my new life.

And I did!

Carl Offner

My father's father, his six siblings, and their families left Latvia around 1907. It was a time of political repression, and they had to get out.

They were city people from Dvinsk, and they had a romantic notion of becoming farmers. They wound up near Montreal, where they were sold some completely unfarmable land. After a year or so, they just left and walked across the border, winding up in Cleveland, where most of the family remained for much of the 20th century.

They were not referred to as "illegal aliens".

Deb Oppenheimer

My mom, her sister and her parents left Germany in September, 1939, to escape Nazi persecution. They lived in a small town, and (according to family legend) the mayor warned them (on the day after Kristallnacht) to find a way out of Germany. Stolpersteins (memorial stones) have been laid for the four of them outside what was once their family home. They first went to Honduras, the only place where they could get visas, staying there for 10 years. My mom, her sister, and father then came to the US in November, 1949, seeking a better life; my grandmother had died from tuberculosis and is buried in Costa Rica — we were never able to find her burial place.

Since my mom had no education and didn't speak English, she worked as a maid when she came to the States; and because her skin was dark (after 10 years in Central America) she endured bigotry.

My father, his sister, and parents also left Germany to escape Nazi persecution. My grandfather's business was looted, his home burned, and he was beaten almost to death — causing them to leave their home in Gedern to go to Frankfurt. My dad left in July 1937, coming to the US by himself when he was 17. I am currently working to have stolpersteins created for my dad and his immediate family; when their stolpersteins are laid, we'll travel for a family history trip through Germany.

Cliff Romash

My paternal grandfather was drafted into the Russian army, ran away, was caught, went out of a bathroom window at a train station, and escaped to the US -- arriving in NY in May of 1914.

My paternal grandmother left Rumania after her fiance jilted her. She and my grandfather were married in New York in 1919.

My mother was born in Zambrow, Poland in 1923. Her father died of tuberculosis in 1928.

My grandmother came to the US with my mother and aunt in 1935 to join her family (since she was a single mom); the rest of her family had all emigrated here earlier in search of a better life.

Brenda Rosenbaum

Many years ago our family lived in Austria-Hungary.

My grandfather Zidey Solomon (Shulem) and grandmother Ida, Bobbe, had six children, including my father Nathan.

Perhaps needing additional income, Solomon went to America in 1914. He went to Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, where Ida had some family. Soon afterwards, World War I broke out in Europe, preventing him from returning home. He lived in boarding houses and worked in various businesses, living as cheaply as possible in order to save money. While he was away, Ida ran a business or a restaurant to support their large family. My father recalled that soldiers stayed in their house—one had no choice in the matter.

After the war, Solomon returned to the family and continued working in business. One day when he was crossing a border—borders changed often in those days--perhaps it was Hungary, perhaps Rumania, perhaps Ukraine—the border guard asked him if he had any money. My grandfather said, “No.” The guard then searched him and found money. Angered, the guard hit my grandfather with the butt of his gun. Upon his return home., my father recalled, his father announced, “We are moving to America!” And they did.

On December 24, 1922, the family sailed to America on the French passenger ship La Savoie (The Savoy). My grandfather had experienced another kind of life in America, and fortunately for us, his family, and all the generations to follow, he recognized the difference between freedom and tyranny.

Brenda Rosenbaum

Many years ago our family lived in Austria-Hungary.

My grandfather Zidey Solomon (Shulem) and grandmother Ida, bobbe, had six children, including my father Nathan. Perhaps needing additional income, Solomon went to America in 1914. He went to Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, where Ida had some family. Soon afterwards, World War I broke out in Europe, preventing him from returning home. He lived in boarding houses and worked in various businesses, living as cheaply as possible in order to save money. While he was away, Ida ran a business or a restaurant to support their large family. My father recalled that soldiers stayed in their house—one had no choice in the matter.

After the war, Solomon returned to the family and continued working in business. One day when he was crossing a border—borders changed often in those days--perhaps it was Hungary, perhaps Rumania, perhaps Ukraine—the border guard asked him if he had any money. My grandfather said, “No.” The guard then searched him and found money. Angered, the guard hit my grandfather with the butt of his gun. Upon his return home., my father recalled, his father announced, “We are moving to America!” And they did.

On December 24, 1922, the family sailed to America on the French passenger ship La Savoie (The Savoy). My grandfather had experienced another kind of life in America, and fortunately for us, his family, and all the generations to follow, he recognized the difference between freedom and tyranny.

But the story continues. As the world became more dangerous in the 1930’s, Grandma Ida and her daughter Marion returned to Europe to try to convince the rest of the family to come to America. Grandma’s mother (Jocheved Solomena) was elderly and frail and her children declined to leave her. A common story in those times. As a terrible consequence of their devotion, they were ultimately found, arrested and sent to Auschwitz. Against all odds, the sisters endured. After the war they made their way to America or Israel. None of the brothers survived.

In their memory from the Kaddish:

May HaShem who makes peace on high, bring peace to us and all Israel.

Rosie Rosenzweig

My parents probably met in Krakow after WWI, when Grodno exiled its Jews on suspicion of collaborating with the Germans. My mother's parents had lived in Grodno, which had once been mostly Jewish, with many Yesihivas and rabbinical dynasties.

In the 1920's, work was not available for Jews; my father's sister and brother had successfully moved to America.

In 1926 (approximately) my father left for NY, where he worked until he had enough money to send for my mom, my sister, and brother in 1927. I have their passports from that time. They ended up in Windsor, Ontario, Canada, where his sister, Becky, had a deli and a Kosher catering business. Eventually he was a peddler with a horse and buggy, a dealer in a pool hall, and finally owned a second-hand shop.

I, their youngest child, had to argue to go to college in Detroit across the river. I was 18 and a junior when I met my husband, who was from Brooklyn, a city I romanticized because it had so many Jews. I was in the minority in my small town. So we married in Detroit in 1955, 2 months after we met; five years later in NY, I became a naturalized citizen of the United States.

Judith Spicehandler

My father's parents came as teenagers from Poland to Brooklyn at the beginning of the twentieth century. The only story I know about their immigration is that my grandfather's older brother, Charlie, came first, and sent for my grandfather, and subsequently all his siblings, and finally their parents. My grandfather had only elementary school education but taught himself both Hebrew and English, becoming an intellectual leader in the small Zionist Hebrew-speaking community in Brooklyn in the 20s and 30s.

My mother's parents were both born in the US. Their parents also came from Poland. My great grandfather was a peddler who took a horse and cart west from NY and landed in Dayton, Ohio because the horses couldn't go any further.

In a sense, my daughter is also an immigrant. I adopted her from China at the age of nine months. Of course she has never known any home except the US, but she was still asked to provide documentation of citizenship when she applied to college.

Henry Tischler

My family's history in Germany goes back many generations. All that came to an end with Kristallnacht, November 9-10, 1938. The next day, my father and grandfather, not knowing that they had escaped arrest the previous night, went out to view the destruction. After they returned, military officers arrived and took my grandfather to Dachau.

My grandfather spent three months in Dachau. In 1939, Germans were not killing Jews yet, and you could be released if you left the country.

In February of 1939, my grandfather was released from Dachau, and one of the requirements of his release was that he had to leave Germany. So, where to go? There's a place you can go where you don't need a visa. It was Shanghai, where I ultimately was born.

At the age of 2 ¼, I disembarked in San Francisco. My entry document said I was 2 foot 11 inches, unemployed, illiterate, and a Hebrew. Although I had been born two years prior to my entry into the US, I consider the real beginning of my life to be the day a policeman took me out of father's arms and carried me to the shore of this great country.

Aimee Yermish

I am the descendant of illegal immigrants.

My great-grandfather Zayde Yitzchak was a blacksmith in a Russian shtetl. He was drafted into the Tsar's army, and the Cossacks tolerated him because he did a good job shoeing their horses. He served his time, went home, got married... and then war broke out again and he was told to report to Siberia.

He buried his gun, burned his uniform, and set out on foot in the other direction. Bubbie Machle was pregnant, so she couldn't come. She had to pretend that she didn't know he had deserted, sending letters to him through the army, until the Army presumed that he must have died on the way.

He walked all the way across Europe, following a trail of safe houses — each kind family who took him in knew where to send him next. In Birmingham, England, he took a job shoveling coal on a steamship. He jumped ship in Galveston, Texas. What next?

There was a crazy-looking old man wandering around the docks, muttering in Yiddish, "Wer ist ein Zhid? Wer ist ein Zhid?" ("Who is a Jew?") He was the next stop along the path, giving him shelter and the money he needed to get to a distant cousin in Philadelphia.

Maybe he didn't speak English, but a blacksmith could work on the railroad. He kept walking, saving the nickels he would have spent on the streetcar, until he had saved up enough money to help his wife and their son get passage to America. I've looked at the immigration records... there was clearly some benign chicanery there, too, carried out by sympathetic attorneys. Bubbie ran a small grocery store, keeping track of everything in her head because she hadn't learned to read or write, extending credit so that no one would go hungry.

We may have entered the country illegally, but it quickly became our home. Their descendants have been successful professionals and active members of our communities. Making runs strong in our hands. And we might do endurance sports for fun now, but those are the same legs that walked across Europe. My grandfather Zayde Morris told us this story so we should never forget.

David Waldman

My mother Henny Wolff and my father Abraham Waldman met in 1946 while at the Deggendorf Germany Displaced Persons Center in the American-occupied zone. During their first encounter, my mother, despite knowing almost no English, was “teaching” English to a group of attentive German and Polish survivors, and she immediately caught my father’s attention.

Henny was born in October 1925 in Breslau, Germany, and was subjected to internment at Theresienstadt from late 1942 until being liberated by the Soviet Army on May 8, 1945. My mother’s parents, Erich Wolff and Ruth Wolff nee Gadiel, and her grandmother Henriette Gadiel nee Levy were also interned in Theresienstadt, but they did not survive. My mother’s parents were transported from Theresiensadt to Auschwitz on her birthday in October 1944, where they were murdered. This agonizing connection to her birthday had a long lasting effect on her. Despite this terrible period of suffering in her younger life my mother’s cup was always at least half full, and she would often say that shared sorrow is a half sorrow, while shared joy is a double joy. During the 1960s, Henny befriended a German family near our home in Sudbury as part of her healing process.

My father was born in November 1921 in Dobczyce, Poland, south of Krakow along the Raba river, a town known for its six tanneries. He was the second youngest of six boys in his family. After the Nazi invaded Poland in early September 1939, my father’s parents Mojżesz and Riwka were transported by authorities to Wieliczka where the Nazis later created a large Jewish ghetto. Most of the inhabitants of the ghetto were murdered in Aktions or deported to the Belzec and Treblinka concentration camps. My father and his brothers escaped Dobczyce ahead of the advancing Nazi army, and returned a few weeks later to find their family’s tannery had been taken over and their house burnt down. My father and four (Jakub, Aron, Alfred, Oskar) of his five brothers amazingly survived the Holocaust: forced labor starting in October 1939, then forced-labor camp at



Henriette, Ruth, Henny

David Waldman (cont.)

Stalowa-Wola starting 1941, the *Julag* Plaszow Forced Labor camp in Krakow in 1942, Buchenwald starting in early 1943, then the Buchenwald Subcamp at Schlieben starting in 1944. After being liberated in April 1945, my father later entered the D.P. Center Deggendorf, where he was registered with a Certificate dated April 2, 1946 as an inmate under the protection of the Military Government of the U.S. Army. His profession was interesting listed as “student” even though at age 24 he had no education beyond middle school.

President Truman’s executive order in December 1945 loosened restrictions on immigration of persons displaced by the Nazis to address the refugee situation in Europe after World War II. Despite many U.S. Congress members being opposed to Jewish immigrants, this order required that immigration quotas give preference to victims of Nazi persecution who were in U.S. zones of occupation.

My mother had registered with the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) in Munich for help in emigrating to the U.S and was given priority due to being the only survivor of her family and being 20 years old. My mother departed from Bremen, Germany on May 13, 1946 on the *Marine Perch* troopship, the second immigrant ship to sail from Europe to the United States under President Truman’s directive, arriving in NYC on May 23, 1946. The 411 Jewish refugee passengers were greeted by multiple voluntary American Jewish organizations, including the JDC, National Refugee Service, HIAS, Vaad Hatzals, and others. Most Jewish refugees received their visas under corporate affidavits filed on their behalf by the JDC. The JTA News Bulletin reported that religious services were held before embarkation, and the passengers sang “God Bless America” and “Hatikvah” as the ship cast off. With assistance from her cousin Ilse Herz, who lived in New York City, my mother was able to get employment in New York City’s garment district and often brought “piece” work home to earn extra income by sewing.



Henny and Father (Erich)

David Waldman (cont.)

My father also registered with the Joint Distribution Committee in Munich for help in emigrating to the U.S. My father and his younger brother Oskar were eventually sponsored by their uncle, who had come to the US in the early 1920s and operated a bakery in Perth Amboy, NJ. My father and Oskar finally received their Certificate of Identity in Lieu of Passport documents from the U.S. Consulate General Office in Munich on May 29, 1946. They departed from Bremen on June 6, 1946 on the Marine Flasher troopship, arriving in New York City on June 18. The manifest listed their destination (128 Kearny Avenue, Perth Amboy, NJ, their uncle's address), age, nationality and visa numbers, and HIAS was listed in the Remarks column. My father's first employment in the U.S. was as a janitor in a movie theater in Perth Amboy and then later in a factory in NYC making galoshes.

My father and mother were able to reunite shortly after he arrived in the U.S. and were married soon thereafter on August 26, 1946 at the New Light Temple on 127 E. 82nd Street, NYC by Rabbi George Lanyi, in the presence of just two witnesses, Max Hamburger, a Polish survivor, and my mother's U.S. cousin Ilse Herz. The marriage certificate listed their occupations as "operators". My parents received their Certificate of Naturalization documents on April 8, 1952 in the US District Court in NYC.

My parents recognized the importance of completing their education being the great equalizer, as neither had the opportunity for a high school education due to restrictions placed on Jews starting before the war. In addition to religious freedom, they considered advancing their education to be the single greatest opportunity available to them in the U.S., and they both completed graduate degrees. After my father completed his graduate engineering degree at University of Michigan, my parents moved to Sudbury in 1959, due to the highly regarded schools, and were one of the founding families of BethEl.

Raphael Woods

My mom was Davida Richie Woods. Her family are Quakers from England, arriving in Philadelphia sometime in the 1700s. The family surnames included Richie, Russell and Goodwin.

Yes, the Quakers were fleeing religious persecution by the English. The Church of England and its nobility required that people bow to them. This remains true, in case you must meet with the current Queen of England. However, my maternal ancestry, believing that every person has a “spark of the Divine within them,” refused to honor only certain people. Hindus also honor every person for their divinity by saying “namaste.” Quakers fled the British hierarchal system of nobility to practice a more egalitarian and quiet creed.

My dad (Francis Marion Woods): his family originated as Presbyterians from Scotland and Northern Ireland. One ancestor named Pirie lived in Belfast, became an Admiral and helped dredge out the Belfast Harbor, which enabled much more commerce, such as shipbuilding. This family’s surnames included: Sinclair, Soutter and Woods. Some of this clan landed in the 1700s in Virginia. A great grandfather, Thomas Sinclair, came via New York to Iowa in the mid-1800s to establish a meat-packing plant. As an astute businessman, he took advantage of the new set of railroads to ship his products from Iowa out to Chicago and New York, then onto boats some of which went back and forth from Belfast. This ambitious entrepreneur sadly died by falling down an elevator shaft at an early age, leaving his wife at home with six children to raise.

But my paternal grandmother, one of these six Sinclair children, wound up in Philadelphia at Bryn Mawr. In that fair city, of course, was where my Mom’s Quaker family also resided in the 1920s. On vacation in the Poconos with their respective families, my Dad and Mom met in 1928. And the rest is Richie/Woods history, as they say. They begat six kids themselves, and fourteen grandchildren, to carry on the Quaker/Presbyterian tradition—well, that is, until one of their more rebellious children married a “nice Jewish girl” (my wife Shoshi), converted to Judaism in 1997...and has helped produce two lovely Jewish kids, with their four (so far) beautiful Jewish grandchildren.