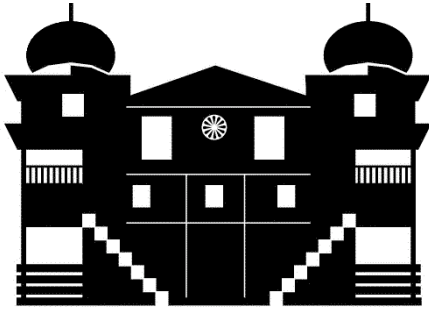


# B'nai Gombin

*Newsletter of the Gombin Jewish Historical & Genealogical Society*



The Gombin Jewish Historical & Genealogical Society (GJHGS) is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization that seeks to educate the public about the history and genealogy of the Jews of Gombin. To achieve this goal, the GJHGS collects and publishes relevant materials, encourages historical and genealogical research, and undertakes activities aimed at preserving documents and relics of the culture and history of Jewish Gombin.

*B'nai Gombin* is the newsletter of the GJHGS. Everything published in *B'nai Gombin* is meant to provide information for Gombiners and their descendants. Articles, stories, poems, or other genres about Jewish genealogy, Poland, Gombin, or other subjects of interest to Gombiners submitted, may be published in *B'nai Gombin*. The views and opinions expressed in *B'nai Gombin* are not necessarily those of the Gombin Society. For further information, contact the Gombin Society by mail at 185 Skyline Drive, Highland Mills NY 10930 or by email. [www.gombinsociety.org](http://www.gombinsociety.org)

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In Memory of Benjamin Guyer - Binyamin ben Shmuel v'Henyah z"l

## Ben Guyer, 1915-2010

Rabbi Avi Friedman, Summit Jewish Center, Summit, NJ 07901

It is an uncanny coincidence that we are coming together today on 27th day of Nissan - the date that the Israeli Knesset designated as Holocaust Memorial Day in order to honor the memory of Ben Guyer. That was the first thought that went through my head when I finally spoke to Hannah after Shabbat.



Further, this week, in synagogues around the world, Jews are reading the Torah portion of Kedoshim from the middle of the Book of Leviticus. This section, known as the Holiness Code, begins with the direction "Kedoshim tih-yu -- Be holy." If we change just one vowel in this word, it becomes "Kadeshim" martyrs - the same word used for victims of the Holocaust. It is a reminder to us of how fine a line it is between being a sacred living being and dying. This was particularly true for Jews during the Second World War.

Who can say what allowed Ben Guyer to survive - good fortune, kindness of others, personal skill, divine intervention or some combination of these things? All we know is that he did survive, and rather than being bitter and angry, he lived his life with kindness and sanctity.

Born in Gombin, Poland some 95 years ago - though there's some question about that - Ben Guyer was one of eight Guyer

## In Memory of Ben Guyer, continued (2)



*Ben Guyer and wife, Annette (right), arriving in the United States in 1946, meeting his sister, Rae (left).*

siblings – the children of Shmuel and Henya Guyer. He was the youngest of the five boys. There were also three girls.

When Shmuel decided it was time to get out of Gombin because of the increased danger to Jews, Joseph stayed behind because he was married with a family. When the family got to the ship, Ben was rejected because of some problem with his eyes. The family faced a decision that no family should have to face. There was no right answer. The family couldn't afford to give up their places on the ship. So, Ben went back to Gombin to live with Joseph.

Unfortunately, that meant that he was still in Poland when Hitler and the Nazis came. Being left behind and

surviving the Holocaust were experiences that stayed with Ben his entire life. Toward the end of the war in Bergen Belsen he met Anna. It was in a displaced persons' camp that she conceived their first child, only that child didn't survive.

Upon making it to the states, she conceived the twins, Sheldon and Hannah. In an age before fertility treatments, the family joked that the "extra" child was compensation for the baby she lost. And then a few years later Sammy arrived.

Ben, who was trained as a tailor got into the clothing



*Benny Guyer (visible as 7th from the right) at the liberation of the Buchenwald concentration camp in 1945*

# In Memory of Ben Guyer, continued (3)

business in New York City. Anna and he were starting their life over in a new country with new dreams. Sadly, this happy period came to an end with Anna's illness and her death in 1968.

Within a few years, Ben and Pearl found each other and they were married for 38 years. Ben became close with Pearl's kids – Sherry and Steve - and his kids became close with Pearl over the years. While Ben and Anna became parents together, Ben and Pearl became grandparents together. He and Pearl danced at their kids' weddings, welcoming Stuart, Pam, Len and Linda into the family

Together, they welcomed their grandchildren and retired to Florida. They were so proud to be the grandparents of Justin & Ellen, Ari & Patty on Ben's side. Jeffrey, Karyn & Russ, Michael & Laura, Dan & Megan on Pearl's side. Hannah & Stuart's kids called him Bimpa and he loved that name.

Eventually they were great-grandparents nine times over – Samantha, Darren, Daniel, Brian & Eric on Ben's side; Mitchell, Amelia, Alexa and Stella on Pearl's side.

When Pearl passed away about two years ago, Hannah, Sam and Sheldon brought him back north to New Jersey in order to be closer.

I must tell you all that I am not just here as a rabbi from the community. My grandfather, for whom I am named was Avram Guyer, Ben's older brother. I never met my grandfather. So, I always enjoyed seeing Uncle Ben - and his two other brothers Sidney and Max - because I always felt that I was getting a glimpse of what my grandfather would have looked like. If one

looks at the old pictures of the Guyer brothers, they all looked alike. I also remember visiting Ben and Pearl in Florida with my parents and grandmother. I cannot say that I understood the conversations in Yiddish, but I remember them holding court in the living room with others from the "old country."

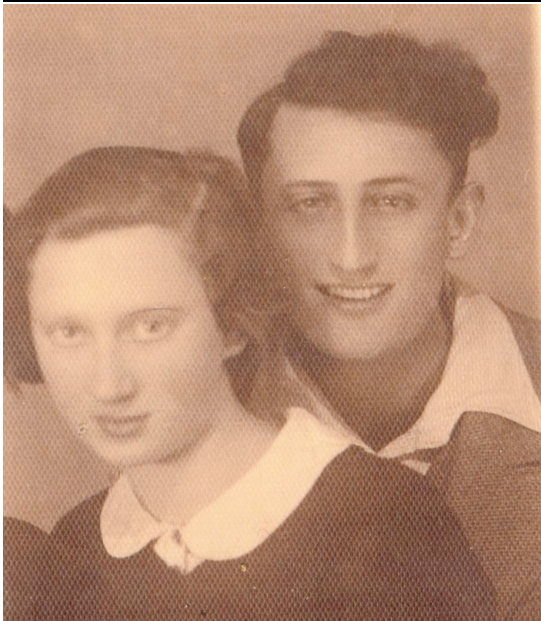
Throughout his life, Ben was very involved in the Gombiner Society. When I lived in Los Angeles, I walked into the closest barber shop. The barber saw my yarmulke and I heard his accent. We got to talking and one thing led to another. It turned out that Leon Green, the barber, was from Gombin. Eventually, he figured out that I was Ben Guyer's great-nephew and he couldn't stop talking about what a great guy Ben was, and how happy he was that I found his barber shop.

When Ben's sister Rae passed away last year, he became the last member of that generation of Guyers born in Gombin. And now we come together on this Holocaust Memorial Day to honor his memory as well.

In truth, the full name of this day created by the Israeli Knesset is "Yom HaShoah v'haGevurah - The Day of the Holocaust and Courage." As we remember Ben Guyer - Binyamin ben Shmuel v' Henya - may we not only remember the fact that he was a Holocaust survivor. Let us also remember the courage he showed in the years after the Holocaust - figuring out how to live his life with the Holocaust so vivid in his rearview mirror.

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*Rywcia and Meir Holcman (left). Photo at right was taken in the library, Gombin, 1930.*

## **My Mother - Rywcia Holcman née Gostynski** ***Gombin 1915 – Kibbutz Evron 1969***

Ada Holtzman, Kibbutz Evron, Israel

**W**e have gathered together today around your tomb, marking the day 40 years ago, that terrible day when you were taken from us. Forty years have passed and sometimes it seems to me that the tragedy has just happened yesterday... because your endless love fills our souls and lightens the paths of our life. I have never forgotten you, and you are my mother always, following me by my side, in all the stations of my life.

To mark the 40th year of your death, we have reprinted the memorial booklet which was published in your memory in 1970 and added additional material. It was mainly done so that your grandchildren, 10 in number, and your 5 (for the time being) great grandchildren, fresh and new offsprings of your family, which you didn't have the privilege to embrace, even one of

them, will get to know you a little and their ancestors' roots.

Almost all your dear comrades and friends who wrote in that memorial booklet have long passed away. By the end of 1969, your death was almost the first of that pioneering and founders' generation and had totally shocked all the Kibbutz members, as if it initiated the end of their era.

Also the Kibbutz itself has changed since then, and not necessarily for the better. But I've heard that in Evron a certain socialist spirit was maintained, standing for equality and supporting the weak. But also there, "privatization" exists. The meals in the dining room are served for money, the "members club" became the "country club" and for payment. Everyone gets a salary now, everyone is a "landlord" with a double

## My Mother - Rywcia Holcman... (2)

meaning, the "Kibbutz" became a "Community". The values of the Kibbutz in which you and our beloved father have deeply believed – full equality in production and consumption – "every member gives what he can and takes what he needs" – disappeared in the course of time. You were a *HALUTZA* and the cemetery is filled with graves and the graves of your pioneer friends who buried with them also their dreams...

I remember the harsh conditions in which we lived and grew up in the Kibbutz, in the 1950s and 1960s. I remember our small house, in which were toilets, a bathroom and a kitchenette, all in one small room of not more 1.5 square meters... I remember the conditions in the children's houses, sleeping there without the parents and thus, many sleepless nights, one pair of home-made shoes every year or two, not to speak of a dress or a robe, which were never in our "closet"... But I also remember that in spite of it all, we had a very magical and happy childhood with you, our beloved parents...

After 40 years since your death, we can say, dear mother, all of your four children, have assimilated your heritage. We

have all succeeded, reached our goals, built families, built



our life in honesty, diligence and persistence... We are all straightforward, truthful, lovers of the people, idealists, naïve still, and seekers of justice and peace...

Forty years since your death... Time passes and in all the joys, which our destiny brought to each one of us, you were missing. But we know you have been watching us from heaven, happy in our happiness, taking part in every occasion, smiling to us with your fascinating smile.

Ten grandchildren, 5 great grandchildren (for the time being) are your descendants, created from your flesh and blood, your family. Every child

is the whole world, who will continue in due time the chain of generations. Each child is beautiful and charming, curious, excels in everything and happy with life, life which was created from you... I have no doubt that you would devote all of your time and energies to raise them as well and love them infinitely, like you did with us. We cannot even imagine how much you would have loved them all.

Your descendants would have been your consolation for the murder of your sick mother, Jached (Yochewet) née Honigstok, for whom you cared for many years in your youth; your father Jakob Gostinski, a butcher in the little town for many generations, who bought for 1000 zloty each, immigration permits from the Jewish Agency for you, our father Meir and other 10 youngsters who left in one of the last ships to Eretz Israel and thus saved their lives; your grandfather Moses; your brother Pinkus (Pinchas), killed in Auschwitz and Chana Laski, his wife whom he married in the ghetto, murdered like all the Jews of the ghetto Gombin in Chelmno and hundreds of other relatives and acquaintances perished in the Holocaust. There was a

## My Mother - Rywcia Holcman... (3)

deep pain which you have hidden from us, the children, *Sabras*, so we wouldn't know, we, the new healthy generation born from the ashes in Israel, a free State, the miracle after the disaster. So we grew up in peace and free of nightmares. But here and there, that hidden pain penetrated me anyway. That was when I saw distant and close relatives from "there" coming to visit us all the time, when you talked Yiddish and Polish between yourselves all the time, when I was looking at the old photographs of the family and Hashomer Hatzair from "there", when I saw you very agitated and tormented when they caught Eichmann and brought him to trial by the Jewish people, in Jerusalem and I wasn't even 10 years old...

About 12 years ago, I founded a special website dedicated to your memory: [www.zchor.org](http://www.zchor.org).

More than a million surfers have visited this website, and it has been recognized, appreciated and recommended. It deals with the family history and that of the individual. I researched Gąbin (Gombin), and then I developed it to include many Jewish communities in Poland which were destroyed during the Holocaust. I build virtual memorials for them, a commemoration to people without graves.... Many times I was asked what my motivation was to be engaged in such a painful subject of Holocaust remembrance. The truth is that inside I felt that this makes me one centimeter nearer to you... Thus, you still exist, at least in my consciousness. You and your ancestors and the culture in that distant and snow-covered country, Poland, which was and is no more. I

commemorate your comrades, idealists, relatives and acquaintances, partners to the new life in the new Eretz Israel, you and your ideals, you and your generation, founders of the Kibbutz and the builders of this tortured land, you who made this miracle with the blood of your heart, fighting the way to freedom in a new and old unknown homeland.

Cruel fate separated us, without even a possibility to depart from each other, and you were so young and we need you and your love so much, during all our lives, even if all of us are over 50 years old. For 40 years we remember you, love you, long for you.

I love you and will carry your memory within me until my last day.

**Your daughter Ada**

**Kibbutz Evron, December 28, 2009**



*Sam Rafel visits Kibbutz Evron, 1948*





## Many new features at Gombin Society Web Site:

[www.gombinsociety.org](http://www.gombinsociety.org)

### NEW FEATURES AT [WWW.GOMBINSOCIETY.ORG](http://WWW.GOMBINSOCIETY.ORG)

#### GOMBIN CATALOG

- Ada Rokocz's story;
- Photographs of Gombiners;
- Immigration & Naturalization
- 1910 Census documents
- Published family histories
- Death certificates

#### PDF BOOKS

- Gombin. The Life and Destruction of a Jewish Town in Poland (1969)
- AKT 454: Gombin Register 1888-1930

#### SUPPLEMENTARY SITES

- Zchor.org; Ada Holtzman's Home Page
- Yivo.org; Institute for Jewish Research
- JewishGen.org; Museum of Jewish Heritage
- Wirtualny Sztetl: Shtetles in Poland

#### GOMBINAMES DATA BASE

- Type family name and search

Three projects have been completed by the Gombin Society over the summer with significant funding coming from our Vice President, Phil Ball. The rebuilt webpage has all the original information and some new material on the history and specific stories of Gombiners. The new webpage has convenient buttons to allow for easy navigation around the vast material in the page. A catalog of documents, photographs and personal stories was collected and posted.



GombiNames  
Database

**Oral Histories:** The Gombin Jewish Genealogical & Historical Society is currently involved in a task to collect and record the history of individual Gombiners who were born or lived in, or nearby, Gombin before its destruction in the Holocaust. To accomplish this we are collecting oral histories from people who knew the town of our Jewish families. Michael Kaplan is coordinating the work.

We are requesting that you participate in this oral history so that your individual story can be recorded and added to the many others we already have. In order to help you organize your thoughts, we have included a list of the type of questions we will ask. Please review them and be prepared to speak with a member of the Gombin Society who will call you. We will be electronically recording the conversation which should last about 30 minutes.



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