

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 descendents. 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 or to receive back issues, contact the Gombin Society by mail at 320 County Route 105, Highland Mills NY 10930 or by email.

www.gombin.org

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Historical & Genealogical
Society

The officers and board members of the
Gombin Society and their families wish you
a happy and healthy New Year, 5765

L'Shanah Tovah Tikatevu

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Issue 15, September 2004

Back To Gombin; An update on the film

Minna Packer

I am pleased to say that the film “**Back To Gombin**” finds it’s way around the globe and is now seen by many on tape in their living rooms and at seminars and festivals and on television in the U.S.A, Europe and Israel. Here are some recent highlights:

I presented the film at The National Yiddish Book Center in Amherst, Massachusetts. The National Yiddish Book Center opened the doors of its permanent home in Amherst in 1997. It is an architecturally distinctive building, which is emerging as one of the most visited Jewish tourist destinations in America. It is a resource for those who want to explore the meaning and relevance of Yiddish culture and modern Jewish literature. My film and talk were presented to a diverse audience within it’s ultra modern film auditorium. I spoke of the inter-generational connection to my *Yiddishkeit* and how making the film provided the missing links to my own as well as many Gombiner’s ancestral past.

At this presentation I met a Gombiner descendent, **Devorah Lifshitz**, who lives in that area with her family. Devorah is third generation, and the grandchild of **Sam Weiss**, who survived the Shoah with his brother Nathan and sister Bela, all of blessed memory. Sam’s daughter and Devorah’s mother, Chana appears briefly in the film speaking of the ways in which the 2nd generation became friends for life through their parents’ efforts to maintain the Landsleit connection. And now here was Devorah with her beautiful baby daughter and husband, crying in the audience, moved to tears by this film and the connections it makes. I will not soon forget her tears and body language which spoke volumes about the connection between a past that was destroyed and a future that is hopeful.

I am also proud to announce that Back To Gombin was also broadcast on Chicago’s Jewish Broadcasting Network on March 28. This was made in arrangement with The National Center for Jewish Film at Brandeis University www.jewishfilm.org which is now the film’s distributor.

Some the upcoming presentations of the BTG will be the inclusion in the World Jewish Film Festival in Jerusalem, Israel, in October 2004. Through **Ada Holtzman**, the film was introduced to Gadi Castel, one of the directors of the festival, who in turn contacted me. He also brought BTG to the attention of Beth Hatefutsoth, The Museum of The Jewish Diaspora in Tel Aviv who has now included it in their film archive.

Another upcoming presentation will be on October 13, 2004 at The Center for Holocaust Studies at Brookdale Community College in Lincroft, New Jersey, in which I will be speaking to an audience of college students and members of the community as well as screening the film.

The goal is still to achieve wider exposure. I would like to see BTG televised more widely in the U.S. and in Europe. To this end, I continue to work with NCJF and others in reaching new television and screening venues.

With its message of peace, hope, remembrance and reconciliation, **Back To Gombin** could not be more timely.

(Minna is the daughter of Michael Zielonka, a survivor of the Shoah, who was born in Gombin, Poland in 1915. He is the remaining survivor of generations of the Jewish family Zielonka and Ber from Gombin which date back hundreds of years in that land.)

President's Report: Gombin Jewish Historical and Genealogical Society (GJHGS) meeting

The meeting of the GJHGS began by recognizing its senior leaders with certificates: *Benny Guyer, Melvin Wruble, Ben Kraut, George Zolna, Henry Frankel, David Rothbart, Michael Ber Zielonka, Chana Guyer, Raymond Boll, Jack Frankel, Rose Dinerman, Steven Rafel, Sara Laks-Fajgenbaum.*



Bernard Guyer, Mindy Proseri, Minna Packer thank Ben Kraut and the New York Gombiners

A special tribute was given to *Ben Kraut* and the New York Gombiner Young Men's Benevolent Association. Ben has donated the remaining funds of the New York Gombiner to our society to carry on the work of perpetuating the story of Jewish Gombin. *Phil Ball* of New Jersey and *David Rothbart* of Pittsburgh will oversee these funds and develop a plan for their expenditure.

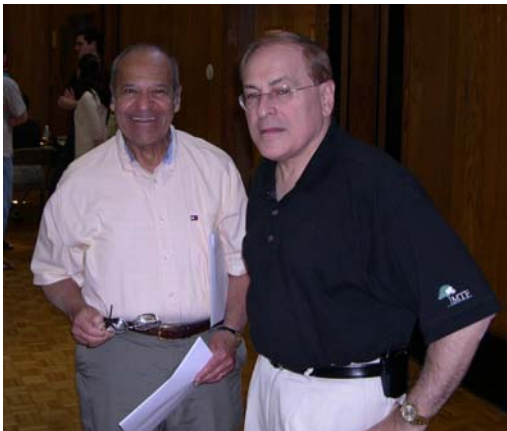
Mrs. Faye Zipkowitz from the National Yiddish Book Center in Amherst, MA reported on the Center's project, working with the New York Public Library, to reproduce over 700 "yizkor" books from shtetlach all over Eastern Europe. Among these yizkor books is our Gombiner book, "Gombin; the Life and Destruction of a Jewish Town in Poland" published in 1969. These books were scanned and

reprinted in hard-bound editions and are now be available from the Center. The first copy was presented to Ben Kraut.

I reviewed the Society's activities of the last 3 years. We have accomplished much, but there is much to be done. We now have a lively exchange of ideas and discussions via email on the world wide web (www.gombin.org). But this is not enough because many of our older members do not use computers to communicate. The "*Back to Gombin*" film has had impressive showings but still needs wider distribution. While discussions of an archive of Gombin photographs, histories and other writing has begun with YIVO, Yad Vashem and the National Holocaust Museum, this project is just in its infancy. The greatest challenge that remains is to bring the living memory of Gombin to the next generation of our children and grandchildren- the 3rd generation. This will be the focus of the coming year.

The most exciting result of the meeting was the decision to begin planning the next trip to Gombin for the summer of 2005. The focus of this trip will be youth. My goal for this next trip to Gombin is to create linkages between our own Jewish young people to the new generation of Polish Gombiners. I hope you will join us in this effort and on the journey (**page 5 for more from Mindy Proseri**).
Bernard Guyer

Photos from the Gombin Society meeting, Cranford NJ, July 11, 2004



The “Back to Gombin” Crew to “Return to Gombin;” Learn more...

As many of you know, The Gombin Society made a momentous trip to Warsaw and Gombin in the summer of 1999. We started from many parts of the world, passed through London, and convened in Poland. It was such a wonderful trip with so many friendships solidified and so much learned that we want to do it again. And we'd like those of you who did not make it last time to join us this time. And, as many of the Gombiner children are now older, we hope they will join us also.

Our current thoughts are to travel to Poland and then on to Israel and go to many of the wonderful historic sites in Israel and of course, to the Gombin House in Israel. We are thinking about going during the late summer of 2005.

As no plans are currently in place, NOW IS THE TIME for your input on ideas and suggestions for places to see and times to go. I have spoken to several travel agencies but I have not yet

selected a tour company. If anyone has any suggestions, NOW IS THE TIME.

Please feel free to contact me through the Gombin Society email listserve (gombinlist@gombin.org) so we can talk about this as a group or if you do not have access to email, please feel free to contact me directly as 845-928-8211.

It would also be helpful to have a tentative headcount of those of you who might be interested in

attending so we can start to get a head count.

I do not think I need to convince anyone who went on our last trip to considering attending. I think most of us can tell you it was a life changing experience. For those of you who could not make it last time... don't miss it this time.

I look forward to coordinating this wonderful trip and having all of you with me when we go “Return to Gombin”
Mindy S. Prospero

RETURN TO GOMBIN
With the Gombin Society
Summer, 2005
NOW IS THE TIME
Contact Mindy Prospero

Send annual contributions to the Gombin Society

Become active & join a committee

Join the “Return to Gombin” trip in 2005

GOMBINER FAMILIES (“*bintle brief*”)

Here is a sampling of the wonderful emails we receive. This is our own version of the famous *bintle brief* (a bundle of letters) that used to appear in the *Jewish Forward* newspaper.

Logan J. Kleinwaks wrote:

Dear Ms. Holtzmann: Pnina Meislish suggested that I contact you regarding a relative of mine who was in Gombin in 1928. I have a photograph of this relative, Rabbi Chanin(a) ZWANG from Kutno, that is dated 28 Aug 1928 and stamped with the mark of "Fot. Moderne//OR. ZANDMAN//w Gabinie." I do not know why Chanin was in Gombin, and wonder whether he or a relative might have held a rabbinical post there. Have you ever heard of this family in connection with Gombin or elsewhere?

... to which **Ada Holtzman** replied:

Sorry but the last rabbis in Gombin were Rabbi Natan Nute Nutkevicz, later rabbi of Rypin; and the last one was Rabbi Unger who perished in the Holocaust. The names Zandman is the name of a photographer in Gombin, I have also many photographs made by him.

Bonnie Pine wrote:

We believe that our ancestors are from this town [Gombin] and are very interested in receiving information concerning this trip [to Gombin]. So far we have about 7 cousins that are interested.

By the way our family name is Gabin. Would you happen to know if there was an orphanage in that town? We think that our great great great grandfather was an orphan and he took the name of the town for our surname.

I think my grandfather Ben left in 1907. I think that his grandfather or great grandfather was in an orphanage. Our last name is Gabin, Gabbin or Gobbin. I believe my great great grandfather may have taken his surname from this town. Is there anyway to find out more info? I have a lot of cousins that are very interested in finding where our roots came from.

Chana Tova Sokol (nee Abromowitz) wrote:

I am a Gombiner and never knew until two years ago that the group was still gathering a generation plus later. In fact, I used the internet information to go and meet a cousin from Gombin heritage. She lives in Beer Sheva, Israel.

...I went to Auschwitz last week and I said a prayer in memorial to the sister and her children and all the older Zolna ancestors killed there April 17, 1943. Many parts of my week revolved around my heritage as a Jew. Gombin is part of my proud heritage.

My grandfather was Nathan (Solomon) Zolna. Solomon was the name he took to enter the US under sponsorship of a relative, Solomon. Zolna was his true last name. His sisters included Lea Holcman, Anna Puro and Raizel Nutkienz. **George Zolna** is my grandfather's nephew.

Arthur & Diane Stupay wrote:

I began to focus on translating family letters, with an aging person who speaks Polish, German and Yiddish. These letters have become a primary source for details about our Gombiner family.

Regarding your Mother, you are indeed fortunate. I wonder if she said anything about either my Stupay relatives or the Gombiner relatives. My Mother was Esther Gombiner Stupay. She was born in Gostynin, but obviously the family took the place name of Gombin, probably in the 1820s when the Prussians forced their newly acquired citizens to take last names. That's what Alexander Beider says in his book on Jewish surnames in Poland.

I believe that my great grandfather, Israel Gombiner, from Gombin married Syncha Stupay, probably in Gombin. Later, they moved to Gostynin, where my grandfather Isaac Gombiner was born and later married Chava Zyonz. The Stupay side of the family moved from Gombin and later Gostynin to Wloclawek, probably around the 1880s or so. I am guessing about this progression. I do know that the Gombiners were in Gostynin in the 1890s and the Stupays were in Wloclawek about the same time. A delightful result for me was that my father Icek (Isaac or Irving) Stupay emigrated to Havana from Wloclawek because he could not enter the U.S. in the mid-1920s and chose a wife who was a distant relative from Gostynin, Esther Gombiner, my mother.

I am also trying to locate a family named Gostynska or Gostynski in the U.S, who were not related but were friends of my family in the U.S. Do they belong to the Gombin Society?

Herman Teifeld wrote:

Hania (Teifeld) Shane was my last living first cousin on my father's side. She was interviewed during your production. Hania passed away last year. There is little that I know about Hania, but there is a lot that I don't know!

My father Jacob Teifeld (Tejfeld) born in 1875, left Gombin around 1899-1900 for the USA. He lived for awhile in New Jersey with his older brother Joseph, but then moved to Chicago to be with his cousin John Manchick (? spelling). He established the mid-west branch of the Teifeld family. He was heavily involved in the Gombiner Verein in Chicago. My grandfather's name was Abraham and grandmother, Hinde. Can you advise me on how to obtain additional background information on my family in Gombin? I also have relatives in Mexico City, whose family left Gombin in the mid 1930's. They have established the "Mexican Branch" of our family, but I'm not sure how they relate to me! We also have an Israeli branch by my cousin Reuben Teifeld, who with brother Samuel left Gombin for Palestine in the early 1930's. Hania's sister Zelda was married to Max Guyer (both deceased), but Zelda's daughter Aida still lives in Detroit with her family. I notice in some of the people listed in your credits have the name Guyer and wonder if they are related? I also knew the Guyer's of the Chicago Gombiner Society! I would appreciate any comments you may have.

Gombin Projects for B'nai Mitzvah

Increasingly, bar- and bat-mitzvah children are using this special occasion to research a topic of personal and family importance. This may be a particularly good moment to get Gombiner grandchildren (and children) interested in their family's heritage and informed about some aspect of the family's Gombin history.

During the coming year, starting Rosh Hashanah 5765 (2004), the Gombin Society will provide honoraria of \$250 to 10 b'nai mitzvah who will research some aspect of their family's Gombin heritage and write up an article for the B'nai Gombin Newsletter. These articles will be published periodically.

Articles should be about 10 pages in length and contain original written text as well as including family photographs, drawings, genealogical

charts, and other materials. A bibliography with references should be attached. Articles may be written in English, Hebrew, Yiddish or other languages, but should be submitted with an English translation.

Many sources of information for these projects are available, including the Gombin Yizkor Book, the "Back to Gombin" film, the original "Rafel" film, a 1927 Occupational Directory of Gombin, the web-site of Ada Holtzman, and various libraries, especially those at Yad Vashem or the Holocaust Museum(s). B'nai mitzvah should be encouraged to interview their elder relatives and friends about the family and its Gombin connections.

If your b'nai mitzvah child wants to discuss a topic and a plan for researching it, please have them contact Bernie Guyer or other Board members.

\$250 prizes for Bar- & Bat-Mitzvah Projects about Gombin

A Poem to my Grandma who wears me around her neck

Kate Guyer

On special occasions, out it comes.
Emerging from a magical box, with lights, lasers and love.
A thick strand with gold circles, representing each grandchild, each great grandchild, shines on your bosom. Sparkling with each ray of sun,
You wear it so proud, it makes me proud to be around your neck.

I know you sit in your rickety old kitchen.
Sitting on a plastic floral chair, in shabby blue slippers.
You stare at the gray TV and the green bush outside.
Everything is faded- the furniture, the once shiny cookie jar.
Your traditions too are slightly worn; Friday candles go unlit.
But that necklace, so close to your heart, always shines so bright.

And since you have never let me fade, I will never let you.

Anna (Rissman) Guyer, 1905-2004

Bernard Guyer, Baltimore MD, August 5, 2004



Our mother died on July 22, 2004, in her 100th year; at the time of her death she was the oldest living Jewish Gombiner.

We were blessed to have a mother who reached that old age; it meant that my sisters and I knew her best when we were adults. We were able to learn from her in ways that young children can't appreciate. She was a remarkable woman: strong, stubborn, highly opinionated, and funny. She was mother, grandmother and great grandmother to many of our friends and their children. She had a prodigious memory and was a living historian of her Jewish life in the 20th century.

Our mother taught us two great lessons: *Yiddishkeit* and family loyalty. Her *Yiddishkeit* came from Gombin, a place that she seared into our consciousness. In her own way, she never left Gombin. I believe that every day of her life she thought about the place, her beloved father and sisters, and

the old friends and characters of Gombin. She loved to tell and retell us the stories. We loved them and were bored at the same time. I'm grateful to her, however, for giving us such a strong heritage. She always knew exactly who she was and what she stood for!

She wasn't really a holocaust survivor, having left Gombin in February 1939 – 6 months before the war began. She saw the old country through the eyes of a young woman and mother, rather than as a victim. She was involved with courtship and marriage, the daily gossip of a busy market town, and with raising young children. She suffered the loss of her first born, Pinchus, but his memory and *matzevah* survived miraculously (as documented in Minna Packer's film, *Back to Gombin* and on Ada Holtzman's web site). She lost her much loved and respected father, Manele, who perished most probably at Chelmno. She crossed the perilous Atlantic with her young daughter, Evelyn, and started a whole new life in Detroit with her beloved husband, Sydney (*Simcha Chaja*), and near her dear brother, Max Rissman. After the war, the Gombiner survivors- young men like *Benny Guyer, Mendle Wruble, Leon Green, Sam and Manny Laski, Saul Tatarka, Saul Simon*, and others- came to our house to begin rebuilding their lives. She was a fantastic historian of Gombin; to site just one example, Jane and I spent hours with her going through the 1927 Business Directory of Gombin and identifying the various families and occupations.

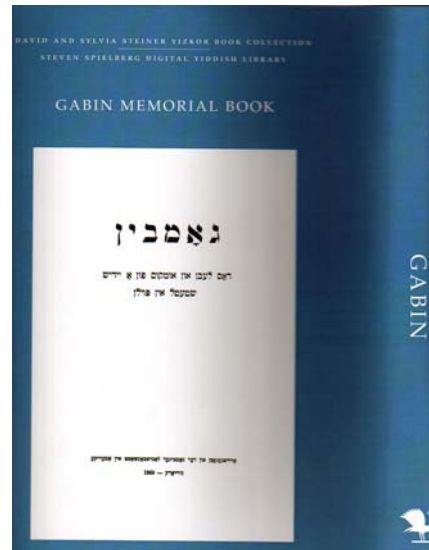
Our mother had a tremendous will to live, going from *simcha* to *simcha*. Above all, she lived to see all of her grandchildren and great-grandchildren grow up. To her, *mishpachah* came first and foremost. Kate Guyer summed up the relationship of the grandchildren to their grandmother in a poem (written in 1992 when she was 16) **(Continued on page 8...)**

Gombin “Yizkor Book” Reprinted- Order copies from the National Yiddish Book Center

Hard bound copies of the reprinted *Gombin (Gabin) Yizkor Book* are now available from the National Yiddish Book Center. These are handsome reproductions of the original volume published in 1969 by a committee of Gombiners, including *Jack Zicklin, Mrs. Yetta Rafel, Dr. Henry Grunbaum, Jacob Celemenski, Abraham Zeideman, David Burns, and Paul Tyber*. The Secretary Editor was *A. Shulman*. The original volume is dedicated to *Sam Rafel*, the founder, organizer and president for many years of the New Jersey and the New York Societies. Zicklin’s forward concludes with the words, *“I conclude with the hope that this ‘Pincus’ will be found in the home of every Gombiner.”* This reproduction of the original Gombin Yizkor book makes his hope a reality.

Ordering information:
Identify yourself as a member of the Gombin Society,
and ask for members price, **\$90.00**

**Send order and check to:
Dan Lopatin
National Yiddish Book Center
1021 West Street
Amherst MA 01002-3375**



Tikkun Olam (continued)



Dana Boll with young Zimbabwean women during American Jewish World Service project in 1999.

Tikkun olam - helping to repair the world

by Dana Boll

In the summer of 1999, following my junior year in college, I volunteered with the American Jewish World Service (www.ajws.org). AJWS is an independent not-for-profit organization whose mission is to help alleviate poverty, hunger and disease among the people of the world regardless of race, religion or nationality. Their college corps program (IJCC) performs *tzedakah*, righteous deeds in response to the Torah's call for Jews to engage in *tikkun olam* - repairing the world.

I spent five weeks volunteering in Zimbabwe, two weeks visiting community organizations in Israel, and a year in New York working in the AJWS office. One of the reasons I was drawn to this program was to have the opportunity to spend time in an entirely Jewish community. This would be the first time that I would regularly observe Shabbat and engage in a religious dialogue with other young people. I have always felt a strong spiritual connection to my Jewish heritage through the stories of my grandparents. My grandmother, Bella Boll, was a member of *Ha-Shomer Ha-Tzair* (the Zionist organization in Gombin) and was very proud of being a scout, active in her community. This was a way to be like her and continue her legacy of caring, with what my father likes to call a "Jewish heart."

In Zimbabwe, under the umbrella of an indigenous non-government organization we were aiding the construction of dam, and conducting oral history interviews in a rural area not far from the South African border. We lived and worked among families, and the experience of connecting with them proved more valuable than the physical work we did. I lived with the *Moyo* family, and became quite close with them. I found that the people there

truly value family and human relationships, as that is really all they have. Possessions are few. They live simply. There was no electricity and no running water in the district where they lived. We would cook over a fire, and in the evening we would come together with a campfire and sing and dance together.

In Israel, we visited an Ethiopian Jewish children's center, an integrated Bedouin-Jewish kindergarten, spent time with Kabbalists in Safed, and helped redecorate a Druze community center. We went to a Kibbutz Lotan in the Negev and learned about their methods of desert survival and progressive efforts to find ways to use materials that might otherwise be garbage. We even went to a community center in the Gaza Strip, where they had begun a program of micro-credit loans for Palestinian women who were starting small businesses. We helped them with an art project, were treated to a dance performance by local children, and I played ping-pong with Palestinian teens.

The IJCC experience was unforgettable and I gained a new, more compassionate perspective on life. I was able to realize how fortunate I have been to grow up as a woman in the United States with the freedom to choose my path. Through the program, I had the incredible opportunity to feel close kinship with people of very different backgrounds. It changed me profoundly.

In times of deep misunderstanding that breed terrorism and war, it seems a large task to repair the world. I believe we can begin with empathy and cross-cultural communication in our daily lives within our own communities.



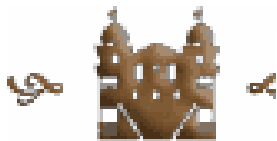
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