

THE IVANSK PROJECT e-NEWSLETTER

Issue Number 18

May - June 2006

Please pardon the late arrival of this issue of our e-Newsletter. I'll try not to let it happen again (NST).

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Photo provided by Andrzej Omasta

A group of uniformed Germans are pictured amongst our ancestor's tombstones.

- **Preserving Our Heritage: Recovering Our Ancestor's Matzevot** by Norton Taichman

In May a group of Ivanskers and their colleagues rescued numerous matzevot from our ancestor's cemetery. These treasures will be mounted in the wall of the restored cemetery.

- **My Trip To Poland, May 2006** by Eli Taichman

Eli, a 14 year old, fourth generation Ivansker accompanies his Zaida and his Uncle to work in the Ivansk Cemetery, and in the process learns something about who he is and where he comes from.

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Letters To Malka, 1938-1939

Letters provided by Malka's son, **Binyomin Karniel (Bnei Braq, Israel)**

Translated from Yiddish by **Miriam Beckerman (Toronto, Ontario, Canada)**

Introduction by Lisa Newman Greenspan (Toronto):

Personal letter writing is something of a lost art in our day. With instant messaging and rapid communication by email, cell phones, webcams and the like, pen, ink and personal stationery have become relicts of earlier times. But for our Ivansk ancestors, letters and [brief, expensive] telegrams were the only available means of communication with dear ones far away. Letters were eagerly awaited and once received were shared, saved and read and reread many times over. Letters communicated deep, urgent personal concerns and maintained family closeness even over long distances.

We are privileged to reproduce below excerpts in translation of four letters written between 1938-1939 to **Malka (Rotenberg) Kahan (1917-1969)**. Malka was born in Ivansk, and in 1938 she and her husband, **Meier**, immigrated to Palestine. The letters were written by Malka's mother, **Chantchke (Chantze, Chanah) Rotenberg** and other relatives and friends still living in Ivansk.

The writers speak of a strong undercurrent of worry in the family about their economic and political situation in Ivansk just before World War II and convey the yearning of young Ivanskers anxious to emigrate to Israel or America. The letters demonstrate the tight and unifying influence of Jewish traditions, the Sabbath and the holidays in the fabric of family and community life in the shtetl. Alas, the world Malka left behind in Ivansk was consumed in the Holocaust.



The Karniel Family, 2006 (Bnei Braq, Israel)

Left to Right: Yumi, N'amah, Leah and Dror:
Not pictured: Malka Tzivya, Yishai

While one sometimes thinks of women in the shtetl as being uneducated or illiterate, these letters, all written by women, show the writers to have been educated and to be somewhat worldly. The writers' concern for the health and well being of each member of their family, including especially that they eat well, is a familiar trait of Jewish mothers, over-satirized in our time of material plenty. But in poverty-stricken Ivansk such concerns were no doubt important to the family's continued existence.

The letters were found in an attic after Malka's death when her home was being readied for sale. Her son, **Binyomin Karniel** (formerly Kahan) of Tel Aviv shared them with me, his newfound cousin; **Miriam Beckerman**

of Toronto translated the text from the Yiddish into English.

Binyomin Karniel is my second cousin once removed and the son of **Malka and Meir Kahan**. He himself visited Ivansk, his mother's birthplace, almost 15 years ago.

During a recent visit to Israel I met Binyomin and his family at their Bnei Braq home for the first time and saw photos of Binyomin's trip to Ivansk, as well as a number of old photos that were sent to his mother,

Malka from Ivansk before the war. He even has Malka's report card from the Polish elementary school in Iwaniska where she studied as a little girl in the 1920s. Seeing the signature of Malka's father on one of Malka's old Polish report cards was especially moving.



Malka was the eldest child in her family. Her mother, **Chantchke** [Chana], father, **Zechariah Rottenberg**, brother, **Yidlka** [Yehuda; Yudl] and sisters **Bracha, Chaya, Freigah, Golda and Shaindel** remained in Ivansk and all were murdered by the Germans.

Malka's family wrote to her often; their letters were filled with love, longing and concern. Their voices are clear, without pretension; their thoughts are tender and poignant. We cannot identify all the people in these communications or explain the significance of several situations, but to Malka and Meir these were familiar faces and events in *der heim* [home]. Malka's mother complains at not receiving more and fuller letters from her daughter; little did she know that Malka did not want to worry the family by telling of the many privations of living in Palestine in those early days, not least the violence from local Arabs.

We deeply appreciate Binyamin sharing his treasures with us. I hope more Ivanskers will dig into their family's shoeboxes and allow all of us to savor voices from our collective past.

Malka's Family (Ivansk, 1920s)

Left to Right:

- “**Yidlka**” (Yehuda, Malka's brother; fought with the partisans; after the war, the family was not able to determine his fate);
- Deboreh Goldhar** (Dobreh; Malka's aunt, Chantchke's sister, immigrated to and raised a family in Toronto;
- Malka**;
- Malka's Aunt** (unnamed);
- Chantchke** (Malka's mother);
- Shaindel** (Malka's sister)

The two girls sitting on the grass and the baby being held by Chantchke are Malka's sisters but are not identified by name.



Malka's Polish Passport, 1938

Letter #1: From Malka's Parents, Brother and Sisters

Ivansk , 11 Dec 1938

My dear children,

We received your letter on the 9th, to which I had been looking forward very much. It was already a great disgrace for me to answer to everyone who asked, because everybody wants to know if you write and what you write. Believe me, my child that you added to my years, because we already had no strength left to endure but in spite of everything I comforted myself by reasoning that you have not yet settled completely and are waiting to write me everything. I thank you my child for writing. May God grant that you will have only good news to write.

Now, my dear children, I do indeed wish you a 'mazel tov'. May it be with great mazel and good fortune until a hundred years. May you buy your own house as soon as possible. This will gladden our hearts. Though we can't see, let us at least hear good reports from you. My dear child, write me if you conduct yourself as is fitting for a daughter of mine. May God always lead you and protect you from evil. My dear, you write how happy you would be if we could partake of your baking. I would be happy if I could just have a look at you but when I get lonesome for you I take out the photos and have a good cry. I cry for two reasons, one being that we are so far from each other and secondly I regret that you are not in the picture of what is going on daily. We worry about you in general. I'm sad that I lost a child who was saved [Ed: "saved", presumably from what's going on in Europe]. I pray night and day to hear only good news from you.

Now my child, you ask me what the situation is with my Ber [Ed: we do not know the identity of Ber, nor the specifics of the dispute involving the debt he owes to the family: see also Letter #2]. So far nothing. He asked me if I paid for another month. I must wait for one month more. You know us well: we wouldn't have gotten involved in a dispute, but if we will not have any other choice we will have to get after him. I'm waiting to see what the Christian women will do with my enemies. There's no further news. Regarding those who owe us money, I have not yet collected anything. Thank God up to now there was income. You know how it is by us. Today it came to a halt: our income has come to a stop. They don't let us earn a living. Itchelle borrowed 10 groschen and we must do more, but God will certainly help us. You saw how, on the week when you were to leave we needed and we earned the money, thank God, so we trust that God will always come to our aid whenever we will be in need.

Now my dear child, I can write you that we have not yet received any letters from Dvora [Ed: Dobreh, Malka's aunt, sister to her mother, Chantchke. Dobreh immigrated to Toronto; her married name was Goldhar]. I worry very much that perhaps something has happened, and from Paitche we have also not received any mail. [Ed: We know nothing more about Paitche.] I thank God that I have a letter from you. This brings some comfort. I pray that whatever happens it should be for the best.

Now my child, you ask me what I wanted to send. Firstly, I wanted to send 'yontovdikkeh schmaltz' [the Warmest of greetings for Yom Tov, presumably Chanukah] and other small things, but it's possible that Henny's Herschele [unidentified] came home. He wants to play a trick and take off. This could happen before Pesach, so I'll send with him. I don't know for sure if he will succeed. [Ed: Presumably, Herschele intends to immigrate to Palestine; Malka's Mother is not sure whether he'll succeed in evading the "British Quota System", which permitted only a small number of Jews to enter Palestine]

Now my dear children, I'm writing you a Mazel Tov: the wife of Auntie Hinda's Motl gave birth to a daughter. May God grant that in the coming year we should hear that a son has been born to you. I would like to be a bobbeh [grandma] already, but don't laugh at this.

Now, my dear children, I don't know to whom to send regards. You Malkehle, I can believe after all,

you swear upon your word, but I beg you Malkehle, don't swear falsely. You must eat because Meier is completely right. He can't watch over you/control you because he is busy and he most certainly wants you to eat well and look well so that he won't be ashamed of you! To you my child Meier I would have much to write in reply but I'm writing this letter in the daytime and my mind isn't clear. I don't know if you are writing in jest or are writing as things actually are because this should really be the reality, but I don't understand that you reminded yourself about the thousands that Reb Shmuel Kohn was told to give you. It's just too bad that I didn't oppose the same thousands because my word is as good as his word but his mazel[luck] is very good. I had no common sense to take him on. [The problem that is being alluded to is not known.]

My dear Meier, may God help you both. May you be blessed with good fortune and may we hear good tidings. May you take of your precious one [my diamond] until a hundred years. Be well and give regards to each one individually.

I still have a lot to write, but it's daytime and I'm being disturbed every minute and I want to send this letter off today. I send regards once again I kiss you many times from afar. I regret bringing this letter to a close because I feel as though I'm speaking to you directly but regrettably it's not the same as talking face to face. I'm cooking borsht today, something that you're very fond of. Do you ever cook this dish?

My dears, give regards to whomever you understand if they are from the Finkelsteins

[signed] Mother and Mother-in-law.

.....

A Note from Zechariah, Malka's father:

To my son-in-law and wife Malka, live and be well.

I wish you lots of luck in your new residence.

May we hear good news from you always.

From your father, Zechariah [Rottenberg]

.....

A Note from Malka's sister, Golda

Dear sister and brother-in-law,

I send warm and heartfelt regards. I wish you all the best from me, Golda. Sala would have added something but she's now in Bais Yaacov [religious school for girls]. She'll write you next time. Hindeh feels the same as always. I beg of you not to delay writing, because I await your mail.

.....

A Note from Malkah's sister, Shaineh

Dear sister and brother-in-law,

First of all I want to wish you good luck in your residence and may you soon be able to buy your own place and may you be happy and content. Dear Malka, you can't imagine the joy amongst all your friends when I told them everything that you wrote and I told them that they should write you. But Yitzchak [*not identified*] is very true to his word. He remembers the promise and he made me be a witness. He wants you to write them something first; it won't work any other way.

Now, dear Malka, about the photos that you want from back home: you would certainly make fun of me but the photographer moved to Chmeliya [Ed: Cmeilow]. I'm sending you his picture; Yitzchak will send you one other picture in a letter.

There's no news at all from me. There is somewhere I could journey to because I have your close ones in

will be. Meanwhile, with that infamous one, Ber, there's nothing yet. I believe that with goodness he will not come through because he would want both the money and the residence. I've already gone through enough with him. I don't want to write you the quarrels we had with him. I don't want to write you the misery we're going through with him, but if he doesn't come across with payment I'll teach him a lesson, but we must have patience. We can't take rash steps.

Now, my child, you write that you don't want to write a long letter because you're afraid that we don't have time to read. First, when I receive a letter from you it's as good as read. Secondly, we have, thank God, enough time to read. By us it's still winter. To the present day the weather is still frosty with snow. Every day our windowpanes are covered with frost. Yesterday there was a snowfall accompanied by a wind. Since Shvat [the Hebrew month] is approaching, let's hope that from now on 'parnosseh' [make a living; livelihood] will improve for us. No doubt God will look after us.

Now my child, I'm very happy that you've already done your Pesach shopping. May God grant that you should always be able to provide yourselves with much good. This will gladden my heart. I would certainly like to rescue Shaindeleh out of here because here there's no existence for her. May the Creator help us that in the not too distant future something good should arrive for her.

With God's help everything is possible.

Bamiyeleh would have come to write you, but she doesn't feel like it.

Your Mother (unsigned)

.....

A Note from Zechariah, Malka's father:

Dear Children

There's no news from us. There's lots of bad goings-on.
May God grant that things should get better.

Your Father (Unsigned)

.....

A Note from Freida, Malka's sister

Dear Sister

I don't have any news to write you because everything has already been written so all that's left for me is to send regards.

Warm regards from me,

Freida.

.....

A Note from Golda, Malka's sister:

Dear Sister

We received your letter for which we thank you.
I send regards and kisses.

From me, Golda

.....

It would be absurd to write you how busy I am, and it's possible that you wouldn't believe me because it's less than a year since you left and you know my business very well; still, there used to be time for me to take a walk in the evening during the week on the Apter Weg [the Road to Opatow]. So what happened now? What change came about presently? Believe me, I myself don't know how it came about, the way life is now. I call it "life" when I don't even have time to accomplish the most elementary necessities for myself. And perhaps you think that the big business is what makes it impossible for me and that I'm so engaged in profiteering. No! I want you to know that Ivansk will always be called by this name. Especially now, everything has come to a halt because of the general tense situation. [Reva may be referring to the stagnant economy in Iwaniska. The sentence, "And perhaps you think.....I'm so engaged in profiteering." may be a satirical swipe at the attitude of Polish anti-Semites towards Jewish merchants.]

But, as you know, father Zechariah dear, may he be well, is weak and last winter was very bad for him. And to the present day there is not a week that he doesn't pay the doctor a visit. He isn't allowed to pick up even the lightest thing, let alone transport goods, or to talk much. All of this is forbidden for him. As a result he comes into the store very seldom. Imagine what a load this is for me. I have to be everywhere. Believe me, more than once I have to cry and wish I were dead because what kind of a life am I leading and what kind of a future do I see for myself? At least if father was well, we're used to working hard. Malka! Oftimes I look for extra work so that I should forget and be all the more tired so that I'll be able to sleep through the night, because in the free moments I see the bitter truth. I know that this won't give you any pleasure but I feel as though you're sitting here beside me and I'm pouring out my heart to you and you listen to me and understand me as always.

Secondly, I don't want you to judge me for bad when you, dear Malka, don't receive a reply so promptly from me. And I ask you not to do as I do therefore take revenge. Have you any idea how much joy a letter from you gives me? Every little detail interests me so much. Though you write very little, even a short letter gives me much pleasure. Then I go to ___[missing word] and Mameshi (diminutive for "mother") and Shaindeleh who tell me everything. We rejoice and sometimes we cry because we can't see it all. Shaindeleh showed me the little pictures that you sent. It's hard for me to put down in words just what I felt at that moment. You haven't changed at all. You have a small "piesek" [belt; probably alluding to Malka's small waist] however (a word that you used to use) but the dress is very good.

Dear Malka, I'm not even bold enough to ask of you a picture of you and your husband, because perhaps lately I haven't earned this. But put everything aside and send me a picture. It will be the greatest treasure for me. I'll be very grateful to you for this.

You write why I don't write more about myself. Nothing has changed in my life and that's why I don't have anything of interest to write. Amongst our 'chevra' (circle of friends) things are not at all good presently. We see each other once a week on Shabbes. We miss you and Yitzchak [not identified] very much. There's nobody to cheer us up and that's why our life here recently is very earnest and everyone is for themselves.

I recall how we celebrated last Sukkot. Do you recall how we danced at Eta's? Gimpel was present. Yitzchak also reminded us about that in your last letter to us. We just received a letter from him. He asks what you write. Indeed it was a wonder for me that he's asking us when he could ask you directly. Anyhow, the reason is that he lost the address and he asks that we send it to him. Of course we'll do that. He doesn't write anything about himself. His letter is just full of questions to us. To date he does not have employment. His writing causes us to sympathize with him. It's as though he doesn't have anyone there who can be of any help to him. What he needs is the same type of 'chevra' (friends) as he had here and that's why he is so lonesome for all the close ones. I really feel very sorry for him. You remember how we used to treat him? Ach, how varied a person's life is. I'm anxious to know what he'll write me. Maybe something different than you write.

The Ivansker Mutual Benefit Society Admits Women to Membership

by Gary Lipton (Toronto, Ontario, Canada)



President **Mendy Shuman** announces that women are now entitled to full and equal membership in the IMBS.

Sunday June 25, 2006 heralded the beginning of a new era at the Ivansker Mutual Benefit Society (IMBS) in Toronto. Following a vote by the general body, women are now entitled to full and equal status in the society. The first women members were sworn in, followed by a celebratory breakfast at the IMBS hall at 3425 Bathurst Street.

The issue of admitting women to the Society began in earnest over two years ago when a recommendation was brought before the executive body. The members of the executive considered numerous “what ifs” that would impact on the decision to admit women as members. These included such questions as to the status of both men and women in the event of divorce and remarriage. Would couples be entitled to cast one or two votes in elections? These as well as other concerns were resolved; the constitution was rewritten, and the result is that the Ivansker Mutual Benefit Society now welcomes both men and women as equals. Although gender equality may seem long overdue in a world of blurred gender stereotypes, gay rights, and women rabbis (not just in the Reform movement but gaining ground in the Conservative movement), it is worth noting that many landsmanschafts still cling to old traditions, excluding women from full membership.



Ronda Cooper (left) & **Sheri Langer** (right).
The first women to gain full membership in the Ivansker Mutual Benefit Society

The acceptance of women to equal status in the IMBS may be seen as an element of the revitalization of the Society, as well as part of a new awareness among Ivansker descendants worldwide. Before World War I the “First Aliyah” of Ivanskers left the shtetl in Poland bound for destinations around the world (especially the area of southern Ontario). At this time it was very common for Ivanskers to go into business together and for their children to marry. The stories that are familiar from this time are of industrious families who lived in tight knit cohesive communities. The “Second Aliyah” of Ivanskers occurred between the two world wars. Not only did many Ivanskers continue to work together and make “*shidichs*” (arranged marriages) among their children, it was at this time that Toronto Ivanskers first organized their own society, including a “*Chevrah Kaddisha*” (Burial Society), a place to pray together at College and Brunswick, and an “*Achzia*” (a branch of the Society that provided low interest or interest-free loans to Ivanskers in need). The Society was officially constituted in January 1932 in the home of Yudel Wilner at 70 Elm Street. And until the outbreak of World War II the Society sent money to relatives in Ivansk through its Overseas Aid Committee.

The Society’s current strong support of the Ivansk Cemetery Restoration Project has done much to create interest in all things “Ivansker” among Ivansk descendants around the world. Never an idle people, there is a new buzz in the air. Ivanskers are not only active in restoring the Jewish cemetery in Ivansk but are also learning about our common history and preserving the memory of those who lived in that tiny vibrant shtetl before its destruction in the Holocaust. The fact that women are now being given the same voice as men in the Society is another indication that there is a new vibrancy among Ivansk descendants.

Let us all continue to work together to learn more about our mutual past. As it is often said, “*to know where you are going, you must know where you came from*”.

“**Yosher Koah**” to the Ivansker Mutual Benefit Society for embracing women as full members!! We will all benefit.

Restoration of the Ivansk Cemetery: Progress Report

by Norton Taichman (Narberth, Pennsylvania, USA)

July 10, 2006

Construction of the wall and gate of our ancestor's cemetery began today!!!

Over two years have passed since we committed ourselves to restoring the Jewish Cemetery in Ivansk. When we started we had no idea of what we were getting into. While there have been more "ups" than "downs", cemetery restoration in Poland (and no doubt anywhere else) is an exercise in how to "keep your cool".

By April 2006 sufficient funds had been raised to erect the gate and the perimeter wall of our ancestors' cemetery. To get construction started we transferred funds from our accounts in Canada and the USA to the *Fundacja Ochrony Dziedzictwa Żydowskiego* (FODZ; Foundation for Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland), which represents our financial interests in Poland. For example, the FODZ is responsible for paying the contractor in installments as the work progresses, but actual work in the field could not be set in motion until all funds necessary to finish the job were in the hands of the FODZ.

In early May we authorized the transfer of \$15,000 (US) from our Poland Jewish Cemetery Restoration Project (PJCRP) account in Buffalo; within a couple of days the money reached the FODZ. Likewise, we instructed the United Jewish Appeal (UJA) Federation in Toronto to cable \$32,000 (US) to Poland. But for reasons that need not concern us here, the money transferred from Canada did not reach the FODZ until the end of June.

Because of this unanticipated delay, restoration of the cemetery was not begun until today and is not likely to be completed until the autumn.

Consequently, we must reschedule the date of the rededication ceremony until mid or late October.

October will be a good time to meet in Poland. Winter will still be weeks away; tourists will have disappeared; the weather will be more comfortable; and the cost of airfares and accommodations will hopefully be lower.

Please let me know if you are considering attending the dedication in Ivansk.

I will keep you up-to-date on possible dates for the ceremony, estimated costs, travel and tour options, and other on-going developments.

Don't delay.

Send an e-mail to < nstaichman@comcast.net > and I'll get back to you!

A Disturbing Image: German Soldiers in the Ivansk Cemetery

Photo provided by Andrzej Omasta (Warsaw, Poland)



It is indeed a nauseating sight: murderers amongst the matzevot of our buried ancestors.

Andrzej Omasta (the PJCRP director in Poland) discovered this photo in a collection of photographs given to him by someone in Kielce, a large town northwest of Iwaniska.

Close examination reveals that the men's uniforms bear hallmarks of the German military. The motifs on the tombstones confirm that these belong to Jewish people. The word, "Iwaniska" was inscribed on the back of the photo; this alone is the only evidence we have to suggest that these men are standing in the Ivansk Cemetery.

For now, let us assume that these men are indeed part of the small contingent of Germans and

Ukrainians who occupied the town. In addition, it appears that German soldiers who were fighting on the Russian front were sent to Iwaniska for short rest periods. They can never be forgiven for the deeds they carried out in the name of the "fatherland". If there's a hell, may they enjoy a long stay!

Preserving Our Heritage: Recovering Our Ancestor's Matzevot

by Norton Taichman (Narberth, Pennsylvania, USA)

The Ivansk Jewish Cemetery was defiled shortly after the Germans were pushed from Iwaniska. Local inhabitants carted off matzevot for use as grinding stones or building materials, and "useless" stone fragments were discarded and left on the ground.

Since WWII Jewish descendents of Ivansk have trickled back to the shtetl in search of their identity. In almost all instances visitors made the pilgrimage to the Jewish cemetery hoping to find a link(s) to family and friends who were buried there or who had no known grave. But all they found was a barren and deserted burial ground, devoid of tombstones or other meaningful landmarks. All they could do was light a memorial candle, recite the "Kaddish" and leave with an overwhelming sense of loss and futility.

Restoration of the Ivansk Cemetery cannot erase the sadness of history. But preserving and restoring this sacred site is a quintessential mitzvah that we as Jews and as human beings are obliged to fulfill. The cemetery is integral to our personal and our collective identity. By restoring the cemetery we honor our dead and create a beacon for future generations in search of their roots.

Locating and returning the matzevot that were taken from our cemetery is an critical component in recouping our lost legacy. According to halachic precepts recovered stones cannot be reintroduced into the cemetery unless their original locations can be verified. Consequently, these precious artefacts will be mounted and displayed on the wall of the restored cemetery.

As an initial step in rescuing our matzevot we sought help from the people of Iwaniska. Almost everyone we approached was sympathetic and offered to support our effort. **Father Stanislaw Kolasa** urged his congregation to look out for gravestones and to return them to the Town Hall. **Mayor Kazimierz Zoltek** personally approached his people urging them to do the right thing. **Mr. Kazimierz Kotowski**, the District Manager in Opatow has committed his administration to improving the road leading to the cemetery. **Mr. Pawel Skowron**, a teacher of English at the local junior high school, appealed to his students to approach their parents and convince them to return the stones. These as well as numerous other generous acts were the norm. Someone who wished to remain anonymous even deposited 3 large stone fragments in the cemetery when no one was looking. Only a very few individuals tried to extract payment for the return of our matzevot, but we refused to negotiate with them. The goodwill and the decency of the people of Iwaniska were very palpable. As a result I genuinely feel welcome and looked forward to revisiting the town.

In May a small group of Ivanskers together with American and Polish friends made the trip to Iwaniska to rescue matzevot fragments that still remained in the cemetery. The volunteers included:

David Blumenfeld (Israel);
Grzegorz (Greg) Gregorczyk (Poland);
Joel Rosenbloom (USA);
Pawel Skowron (Poland);
Elya Taichman (USA);
Norton Taichman (USA)
Russell Taichman (USA)
Kazimierz Zoltek (Poland)

Grzegorz (Greg) Gregorczyk (Poland), **Gary Lipton** (Canada), **Lisa Newman** (Canada) and **Andrzej Omasta** (Poland) helped to organize the expedition

Loyal readers of the e-Newsletter should be familiar with Andrzej, David, Gary, Greg, Lisa, Norton and Mayor Zoltek, but a few new faces require an introduction:

Joel Rosenbloom is a retired molecular biologist. We were colleagues for over 30 years at the University of Pennsylvania. When I told Joel about my plans to return to Iwaniska, he revealed that his family also came from Poland, but he did not know the exact location. So, why not adopt our shtetl and help out? Joel can now consider himself an Ivansker.

Pawel Skowron is an English teacher in the junior high school. We met during my last visit to Iwaniska when he volunteered to act as a translator in gathering testimony from Iwaniska elders. We have kept in touch, and he has been instrumental in our search for matzevot in the community surrounding Iwaniska. He is also actively involved in promoting the essay contest we are sponsoring in the school to foster Polish-Jewish awareness.

Russell Taichman, my eldest son, is a periodontist and a molecular biologist at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor where he teaches and carries on research relating to mechanisms of prostate cancer metastasis. Russell and his wife Susan have an adorable 2-year-old little girl, Garielle. Russell spends two weeks in the Arctic every summer as a guide for the Sierra Club.

Elya Taichman, my eldest and my favorite (and only) grandson is 14 years old. He is entering the 9th grade at Akiba Hebrew Academy outside Philadelphia. I think I'm the only one who calls him Elya; everyone else knows him as "Eli". Eli is an avid sports fan (basketball, baseball, football and the Toronto Maple Leafs hockey team): somehow he still manages to excel in his academic studies.

On May 22nd Elya, Joel and I drove south to Iwaniska to meet up with David, Pawel and Russell. Unfortunately, Greg could not come because his job required that he remain in Warsaw. At this time of year the Polish countryside is incredibly beautiful: dark forests, rolling hills, brilliant yellow and green fields, and small, well-maintained farms. On the way, we stopped in Ilza to take part in the rededication of the Ilza (Drildz) Jewish Cemetery. Several of the town's Jewish descendents came from overseas (mostly Torontonians) to attend the event, which also attracted a large number of townsfolk. A moving ceremony paid tribute to those who once lived there.

Upon arriving in Iwaniska, we strolled through the town deeply conscious that this little place was once home to many generations of our people. Since my last visit, Iwaniska has undergone numerous improvements: the village square is being upgraded with new brick pathways, colorful flower beds and a memorial honoring the Polish Resistance during WWII; fresh paint covers most homes and businesses, many of which are undergoing extensive renovation. Iwaniska's personality has been transformed from a forgettable, backwater farming community to one that is attractive and inviting to the senses. The Mayor is doing a splendid job!

We worked in the Ivansk Cemetery from May 23rd to May 26th; the weather was perfect most of the time. Prior to our arrival the people of Iwaniska cleared the cemetery of overgrown vegetation, otherwise it would have been next to impossible to find anything. We recovered numerous large as well as smaller pieces of tombstones. The work was challenging but very rewarding. The collected stones were taken to the Town Hall for safekeeping until they could be embedded in the cemetery wall.

A partial photographic record of our undertaking is presented below. Those of us who took part in this endeavor will never forget the experience and the feeling of having done something really significant.

Legend to the Photos on the Next Page		
1	In Front of Town Hall	David, Pawel, Joel, Eli, Russell
2	Meeting with the Mayor	Pawel, Joel, Eli, Norton, Russell, Mayor Zoltek
3	Ready for Work in the Cemetery	Eli, Joel, David, Russell
4	Thanking Those Who Returned Matzevot	Pawel, a farmer who acted as a mentsh, Norton
5	Thanking Those Who Returned Matzevot	Father whose son urged him to return Matzevot
6	Thanking Those Who Returned Matzevot	Grandfather sets an example for his grandchildren
7	Orienting and Marking Matzevot	Norton paints arrows on back of fragments (see #16)
8	3 Pieces of the Puzzle Fit Together	Two additional stone fragments also belong to this artifact and were found later
9	Uncovering a Matzevah	Pawel & Norton remove debris covering a tombstone
10	Lunch Break	Cheese, bread, sardines, oranges and water
11	Cleaning a Matzevah	Joel removes 60 years of debris from a Matzevah
12	Three Generations Return to Ivansk	Eli, Norton and Russell
13	Almost Intact	Three stone fragments fit together in this matzevah
14	Loading Matzevot onto a Truck	Schlepping Matzevah for storage in Town Hall
15	What's Going On Over There??	I can't digest my food with all the noise!
16	Individual Tombstone Fragments	Arrows on back indicate "right side up"



My Trip To Poland, May 2006

by Eli Taichman (Penn Valley, Pennsylvania, USA)



For those who do not know, in May I spent 8 days in Poland with my Zaida. It was an outstanding trip that I will always remember, no matter what. Now, I suppose everyone reading this wants to hear what I did on this trip. Well, that is what this paper is for.

When I first discovered that I was going to Poland I did not know what to think. I admit there were times when I was worried about going because of the amount of schoolwork that I would be missing. This included a book report, a math test, two Jewish Studies quizzes and much, much more. Well, this may not seem like a lot of work to an adult; however, this would be considered a bad week by any 8th grader in my school.

When my Dad asked me if I wanted to join my Zaida on this trip I told him about the amount of work that I had. He agreed with me, it would be tough. I actually hoped that he would tell me not to go. Then he said that when I reached his age, I would barely remember a single moment of middle school. But I would always remember a week in Iwaniska. After I heard this, there was no question about whether to go or not.

My Dad was right; I had to go!

I left Philadelphia International Airport on Friday, May 19, 2006. My Zaida and Dr. Joel Rosenbloom accompanied me. After a long delay taking off from Philadelphia, and waiting 5 hours in Frankfurt because we missed our connecting flight, we finally arrived in Warsaw in the late afternoon, a day after leaving Philly. At the airport, Greg Gregorczyk and his daughter Basha met us. We then left for the hotel.

When most people think about Poland they imagine a poor country that would not be very pleasant to visit. Well, that was what I was imagining too before I left Philadelphia. I did not expect the food to be worth eating, or the hotels worth sleeping in. I expected the country to be polluted from the communists and for trash to be everywhere. In all honesty, I was wrong. Forgetting two meals, all dining experiences were beyond acceptable. All the hotels, except for one, were quite suitable for sleeping in. Lastly, in some ways Poland is a much cleaner country than the United States, at least the part I visited. When I was out in the farm country there was no garbage anywhere. I have driven through the Southern states and parts of Wisconsin and have to admit that they are not nearly as clean as the farms in Poland. Americans seem to leave old tractors or trucks out in the middle of nowhere. This is not the case in Poland. It seems as if the Poles take more pride than we do in keeping their land clean. This impressed me, especially because I had expected to see lots of trash.

During our stay in Warsaw we visited some of the historic sites. Of all the places the Jewish Cemetery stood out the most. The size of the place was just incredible. It just kept going and going and going. I later read that the cemetery holds approximately 250,000-500,000 graves. I also found that the scenery was rather

pretty, at least for a cemetery. There were trees all over the place providing nice shade. It was sort of like a little forest. I could have easily spent a whole day there and I would have been interested the whole time.

After two nights in Warsaw we headed south to Iwaniska to start the main part of our adventure. While the ride may have been long I enjoyed hearing my Zaida and Joel tell jokes. It was also very interesting when my Zaida started telling us stories about his family when they lived in Iwaniska. After a quick stop in Ilza, to witness the rededication of another Jewish Cemetery, we finally made it to Iwaniska.

At this time I felt very special. I had just come to the very place that I might have been living in had my family not left many years ago (providing there was no Holocaust). The fact that I was seeing where I could have lived was truly amazing. I don't think that anyone else in my class, my grade, or even my school has ever gotten to experience this. In fact, I would not be surprised if the majority of the kids in my school did not know the name of the town their family comes from.

The work that we did in the Jewish cemetery during the next few days was not hard; instead it was interesting. It was very fascinating to look at head stones that could belong to my ancestors. It was also neat to know that this is where my great grandfather and his parents, brothers and sister once walked. It was very satisfying work as well. On the occasions when I found a gravestone with writing or pictures on it I was very happy. I would say that for every forty stones that you find only one of them is "worth" keeping. What was really amazing was when my uncle Russ, who joined us in Iwaniska a day after we arrived, found a massive stone about two and a half feet long. This find was made even more important when we discovered four more pieces that formed part of the original matzevot. When all the stones were pieced together we were amazed that they formed a picture of a bird, a tree and candlesticks. The candlesticks indicated that this was a woman's gravestone. I later found another stone that was face down on the ground. As it turned out, I had overlooked that very stone the previous day. I was lucky that David saw the stone and asked me if I would remove it from the ground while he filmed me. I think that the work I did in the cemetery will stand out in my mind forever. The work that I did there was so important. Not only was it a great mitzvah, it also let me discover who I was and where I came from.

Another highlight of the trip was playing with some of the local kids. During free time, I walked over to the local school in Staszow, a town where we stayed for two nights. The boys were playing basketball and I asked if I could join them. Fortunately, they understood English and let me play with them. It was a lot of fun. After playing with them I kept thinking to myself that it must have been very peculiar for them to see a Jewish American from Philadelphia in their town. My guess is that they had never seen someone like me before. Other Polish people that I met on the trip were very friendly and always made me feel welcome.

Another great part of the trip was the food. As I said earlier, most people do not think of Poland as a place to eat. However, all of the meals, except for those in Staszow were quite good. At every meal my Zaida required that I order hors d'oeuvre, several drinks, a large entrée, and at least one desert. My Zaida definitely did not let me go hungry. One very interesting thing about the trip was the price of the foods. At one meal I was able to order a roasted duck for 30 zloty, or ten dollars. In America, such a duck would have been at least 25 dollars. Without a doubt, I prefer Polish prices to American ones.

The last thing that I have to say about my trip to Poland was that while I was where my ancestors once lived I was also there with my Zaida. This meant that he was able to tell me stories about our family and where the Jewish people once lived in Iwaniska. If he had not been there, I would not have known where the shul once stood. I would also not have discovered where my great grandfather had once sat by the stream and made whistles from a willow tree. While I may have been in the land of my ancestors, without my Zaida it definitely would not have been the same experience.