

This story was written in Yiddish in March, 1954 by Isaac Hersh Perlstadt with the idea that it was necessary for the family to know their roots. The translator was Sidney Perlstadt, his son.

### ***Zeidi's story***

I begin with my mother's parents. My maternal [step (SMC)]-grandmother, Chaiah Devorah, died quite young. I knew little about her except that my grandmother's brother (Meyer Wolf From? Frum?) used to visit us (SMC note later, he was the brother of Zeidi's Step-grandmother? DNA and the paper trail confirm that the biological grandmother was Lea Stokfisz). As I remember, he would generally come for some happy occasion such as a wedding or Yom Tov. The discussions, as usual, dealt with the Torah. He was always the one who had discussions with his nephew, my uncle Tuviah, who was a great scholar, quite a genius. I will later tell about him. This shows that my grand-uncle was also a scholar in that field. He was a well established business man. His children, our second cousins, would visit us quite often, and we younger children were intimate friends. We called each other by our given names and addressed each other as "du". That is all that I remember about my maternal grandmother.

#### ***My Maternal Grandfather, Reb Leib Anker, blessed be his name.***

I don't know whether he was a scholar. I remember that he would continuously recite the psalms. This makes me believe that he was not a scholar in the sense that Jews were scholars at that time. He prayed in a "shule" and not in a chassidic "shtiebel". He was not a "chassid" and did not travel to rabbis. His income was from two sources. He had a grocery store and he was also a cattle broker. He had four children from his first wife, two daughters and two sons. From his second wife he had four sons (Beryl, Avigdor, Lazar and Avraham) and three daughters. My mother was the second daughter from his first wife. My mother's half-sisters and half-brothers were about the same age as we children, and we got along very well together. We would visit my step-grandmother very often and she would serve us raisins and almonds. The girls went to a Polish school, there was no other. The boys went to "cheder". Three of them grew up to be scholars and one went to work.

#### ***My mother, Niche Breindel, blessed be her name.***

She became a widow quite young and she did not remarry. We were seven children, four sisters and three brothers. My mother also had a grocery store and as long as I can remember at 44 Novolipie Street, (Warsaw). I don't remember our ever having any other grocery store. Her middle years were not happy under any circumstances. She was a good mother and a devoted soul not only to her children but to other people too, and always helpful to poor people, particularly poor children. She never pushed herself to the front but did her part quietly until she became ill.

The doctors called her illness during her middle years as "nervousness". She would remain lying in bed for several weeks with her face to the wall and groan, Oi, Oi, without any reason. Nothing hurt her but she would groan. This would continue for

several weeks at a time, up to six or seven weeks. Suddenly, she would get out of bed, make breakfast for the children, open the store and do business as if nothing had occurred. This would endure for a certain time, then she would get sick again then get well again. This continued until she became paralyzed and was bedridden for about seven years. All the children nursed her, the sisters during the days and the brothers during the nights. Each night a different brother. She was completely immobilized during the later years. In those days there were no paid nurses, only in hospitals. There were very few Jewish nurses, mostly they were Catholic sisters. Notwithstanding our great hardships, my memories of my mother remain dear to me up to the present days.

### ***My mother's (of blessed memory) sisters and brothers***

#### ***My Aunt Liebe Reisel.***

My aunt was the oldest of four children. She was the mother of Aaron Wagner of Winnipeg, Canada. She had seven children, six sons and one daughter, the mother of Joseph Kirshrot. My uncle Wagner was well off. He was in the metal business. They had trouble with two sons Mendel and Jacob. Both were had difficult adolescences. Mendel's rebellion consisted of not staying put. He left his home and wandered around for weeks and no one could find him. He used to steal to support himself. When his shoes were torn and his feet hurt he would come home until he was well rested. Then he would disappear again. The second brother, Jacob, was melancholy. He would not talk and he would not answer. Both of us were of the same age and we got along very well. We were at that time 15-16 years old. He eventually out grew it (with some help). He married and had a child. My cousin Aaron Wagner of Winnipeg, Canada and his nephew, Joseph Kirshrot, founded the Standard Produce Company there. He died very young leaving a widow with three children, Mitchell, Irving, and Leona. The other children (Aryeh, Reuven, Samuel, and Hannah-Esther) remained in Warsaw and disappeared because of Hitler, may his name and memory be erased and never be remembered. (This is an expression from the Torah regarding Amalek who was the first enemy of the Jews on the way from Egypt to Israel). (SLMC note. It appears that Leibe Reisl and Moishe Wagner had 8 children, including 2 daughters. Isadore Kirshrot, the son of Joseph told me that his grandmother's name was Chaiah Devorah. But JRI Poland confirms that there was a Chana Wagner, who was born the same year as Mendel. Chaiah Devorah also died in 1934 before Hitler and a different story of Zeidi's named the Hannah Esther by name.)

#### ***My Uncle Joseph (mother's brother)***

My uncle Joseph took after his father. He said the Psalms and was a pious Jew. Since he had a grocery in a village not far from Warsaw, (Susnovitch??), he also became a little bit vulgar. We children liked him especially because he had a horse and wagon for business. When he came to visit us he gave us rides and five kopecks.

### ***My Uncle Tuviah (mother's brother)***

I don't know the reason why he was raised in our home. Although my father was then not living, he was raised by us and not by my rich aunt. Perhaps she paid my mother. We never heard any mention of money.

Tuviah was a great student, a true savant. He never worked and did not help in the grocery, but was treated like the other children at home. He shared his learning with other young men. In the Beth Midrash he studied with several young men without pay. My brother Heynach studied under him. I was too small to study with him. He watched over me and my brother, Jacob, so that we would understand what we learned in Cheder. He would give us his explanations and that gave us more knowledge and understanding.

He also had a great fault, he did not understand child psychology. Although he loved me very much and wanted that I should be at least a "goen" (genius), he did not allow me to play with other children of the neighborhood. He wanted to cram me at once with all knowledge. I must have been 8 or 9 years old and he prohibited me from having friends because the children were all of the Madenberg (the Madenberg were apparently ordinary working people-SMP) cut and according to his belief they were not worthy enough to be my friends. In order to make me feel a little freer, he allowed me to sit on the stairs for half an hour and get some fresh air. After that back to the Gemorah or Chumesh. My brother Jacob and I were never permitted to talk in his presence except when we were questioned. His motto was that children must only listen: I have him to thank for my inferiority complex. I believe that he broke my spirit because at times when I am with people I only listen and do not talk. He married a rich girl and her father gave a large dowry. He was in the installment business. He talked a literary Polish and as he was an honest businessman, the Christians liked him and patronized him and he worked himself up. However, he never gave up studying with poor young men, but studied with them at home, every night for several hours.

He was offered a Rabbinate but declined saying that he would not be a sycophant and hypocrite. \*\*\*\*\*Characteristic how nature pays back. My oldest sister, Tobeh, was crippled, she had a hump-back. All the people on the street said that Tuviah would certainly marry my sister. Perhaps mother also thought the same. The result was different.\*\*\*\*\* He had a daughter and three sons. The only daughter, poor girl, also had a hump-back, and I heard him say once when I was at his house "I am guilty of your misfortune". I did not understand what he meant. My mother then told me that all the neighbors thought that he would marry Tobeh and God punished him.

### ***My Sisters and Brothers***

Four sisters-Tobeh, Chaia-Deborah, Hannah-Sarah, and Freidel, Heinach my older brother and Jacob, the younger one. My sister Tobeh was very intelligent and I would say with a very beautiful face. She also had a hump-back, but her other fine qualities overcame this. She married a Beth Hamidrash scholar. His name was Solomon Yehuda

Kopsdorf. He was an orphan and was raised by an aunt and uncle (Kupperman). They gave him a good Jewish education. He was not a scholar like Uncle Tuviah but a very gentle man and a good brother-in-law to me and the other children. I was twelve years old when he became my brother-in-law.

If Tuviah was our uncle then Kopsdorf became our father. He understood us children better and gave us a different view on people, that not all must be supermen. I would say that Tuviah was a despot. He, Solomon Kopsdorf, was a true liberal and we all loved him and had respect for him. I have to thank him for the little learning that I have. We loved each other very much. He would wake me at six in the morning and we would study until eight. Later we prayed, had breakfast and went to work. I then became Bar Mitzvah, and mother was not able to pay any tuition and I had to go to work. My other three sisters- whether one was occupied in the grocery, or whether one was occupied with domestic matters, they were all alike in one respect- they read books. We three brothers all went to Cheder until thirteen and then we started working. My brother Heinach would study with my uncle Tuviah after work.

My sister Tobeh's and brother-in-law's two children are at present in Israel. There was a third one, Simon, whom you, Sidney, should remember. He died very young in Paris. The other two my niece and nephew live in Israel. Her address is Sarah Sigelbaum, Rabbi Cook St.#125, Ramat Gan, Israel. Moshe's address is Moshe Kafri Tekuma Dar ne Negev, Israel.

At the time that I left for America in 1913, my sister Hannah Sarah and her husband Feinsilber went to London. She has there two or three daughters. You may be able to get their address from my niece Sarah Sigelbaum in Ramat Gan.

### ***My father's mother - grandmother Rebecca, of blessed memory***

I remember her very well since we would go to her house very often. She never left her house. She also was a tall beautiful woman. She lived all the time with her youngest daughter. She died at a very great age.

### ***My Grandfather blessed be his name, Reb. Itsel Perlstadt, The Cohen***

All that I know to tell I heard from my aunts and uncles. I did not know him. I carry his name Itsel.

He was a tall and handsome man. He was a great Talmudist and very bright. He was famous in Warsaw as a "Gaseh" Shochet. (A shochet is not a butcher as one might say in English. A shochet had to be very learned and had to have a diploma from several rabbis because there are many rules and laws regarding Kosher meat and the shochet had to know all of these.) A "Gaseh" Shochet meant that he would shecht only oxen, calves, etc. not poultry. The poultry shochets belong to a lower rank, strange as it is to believe. The aunts used to tell that grandfather once cut a silver ruble in two with his knife and that the knife remained sharp enough to be Kosher. He demonstrated this before a group of rabbis as there were informers who said that his hand shook and that he could not hold the knife steady. I heard this from my aunts. The rabbis of that time recommended him

to go to New York and become there a rabbi and a shochet. At that time the Polish and Galician emigration had just begun. My grandfather categorically refused to leave his native city. (Perhaps the Perlstadts would have looked different if he had come to America. Don't you think so?).

### ***My Father Reb. Abram Moshe Perlstadt, blessed be his name, the Cohen***

All that I remember of my father is when all of us children rode to his funeral. He was sick with tuberculosis and died very young, in his middle thirties. I was then four or five years old. He died at a summer resort near Warsaw which was called Novo Minsk. After my grandfather's death he took over his practice as a shochet. Not everyone could get a license to be a Kosher Shochet. In addition to obtaining a diploma from several rabbis one had to pay a certain sum to the Jewish community for the upkeep of various Jewish institutions.

He was also a great scholar and a bit worldly. The Novo Minsk burial society did not want to release his body as they considered it an honor to have him in their cemetery. I remember the large bookcase with Gemoras and other books that remained after him. My mother, of blessed memory, did not want to sell the books. She did not want to part with them. She gave her brother Tuviah only the guide to the Perplexed, the philosophical work of Maimonides.

### ***My father's sisters-Hannah, Deborah, Niche, and Dobe***

I shall tell only about two of them because I remember them better since they used to come quite often to the house and both had a great influence on our upbringing. My aunt Deborah was an excellent housekeeper in baking, cooking sewing embroidery, crocheting, etc. In addition she was to us like our own mother. She had only one son Joshua Passenstein. Since our mother was ill most of the time, Aunt Deborah took over my mother's, of blessed memory, duties.

The second aunt, Dobe was a highly educated lady. She read all the classics and was very familiar with Polish, Russian and German literature. She had a great influence on us particularly on my sister because we boys had to be occupied with the Gemoras, etc.

### ***My Uncles- my father's, of blessed memory, brothers***

There were four brothers Bonem, my father Abram Moshe, Mordecai-Yehuda, and Ziskind. I did not know my Uncle Bonem, like my father he died very young. His wife and children, that is my cousins would come to visit us. My second uncle Mordecai Yehudah was not much of a scholar. He was a real estate administrator and later became a house builder. His grandson lives in New York. My youngest uncle Ziskind lived in another city near the Austrian border. He had there a general store. He was also a great scholar. His son Itzel had a millinery factory in Detroit, Michigan. He went under his

mother's name, Shapiro (Schapiro?).

### ***My wife's family***

Her grandfather and grandmother on her mother's side

### ***Reb Aaron Bigos***

I did not know personally her grandfather, Reb Aaron Bigos. He was a pious Jew. He had a grocery store on Chrochmalna street. He was well off and was a philanthropist supporting Jewish institutions, etc.

I knew her grandmother Libe very well. She was an intelligent and beautiful woman with all good Jewish attributes. They had five children, three sons and two daughters. They were my mother-in-law Rebecca and her sister Chaiah. The three brothers were Mendel, Mordecai, and Meier. The oldest brother Mendel took after his father in plainness and good nature. On the contrary, the other two Mordecai and Meier were great Talmudists and scholars. Meier was well read in worldly literature but only that translated into Hebrew. However they were all pious Jews. I will have more to say about them. (Halina Bigos Garson Meier's daughter said that: Meier was Mordecai's son not his brother. But the Meir's son who lives in London was Halina's brother. – SLMC) Meier's son lives in London, Aunt Tobe should know his address. my mother-in-law's sister Chaiah was married and had three children. (SLMC note – from Molly's father's data Reb Aaron Bigos was a Cohen).

### ***My mother-in-law, Rebecca - of blessed memory***

She was a model of a mother-in-law. Her goodness is indescribable. Unfortunately, she became a widow very young and with ten living children. She had a coal store and from that she made a living and raised her children. She was a very pretty woman. None of her children had her beauty. Only Tobe can be compared to her.

### ***My father-in-law Reb Joshua Moshe, blessed be his name, Karmelek***

To my great regret, I did not know him personally. (We lived very close to the Karmeleks but did not know each other). He was a great scholar but at the same time well informed in worldly literature. He was very well read and cognizant in worldly matters. His library was rich in Hebrew as well as Polish and German books. After he died, the uncles Mendel, Mordecai and Meier tore up various Hebrew books which to their understanding were heretical. (Uncle Itche Carmel told me this.). After my wedding I admired the books that were there. He shared his knowledge with his children especially with Sarah and Itche. He recommended books for Sarah to read and studied Gemora with Itche. Itche brought with him to Chicago many rare books and before he became sick he thought of donating the books to Washington. My suggestion was to donate the books to the college of Jewish studies here in Chicago. Itche received a very nice letter of thanks from Mr. Sam Blumenfeld. Molly perhaps has saved it. My father-

in-law was a salesman by profession. In later years he had his own wallpaper store. By us in Warsaw wallpaper was a separate business and had nothing to do with paint. Since the seasons were only a summer season, he had plenty of time to study, read and debate with his friends. Since he had plenty of leisure time and certainly a very beautiful wife the family Karmelek became quite prolific. I found ten living children when I joined the family. It is interesting to give their names.--Sarah, Itche, Chaiush, Yechiel, Esther, Tobe, Joseph, Prive, Aaron, and Wolf. Aaron died a short time after my wedding. You all knew Itche. My wife of blessed memory will be in a separate chapter. Chaiush had fantasies of higher worlds. She tried to write poetry, wanted to do sculpture and in the end married Israel. I believe that their family life would have been much better if she had left him alone in this world and had not tried to raise him to her level, which she could not accomplish to this day.

Yechiel went to Israel as soon as he was freed from military service. That must have been in 1909 or 1910 and he has remained there to this day. He never corresponded with me directly. His address is I. Carmel, Gordon St. #85, Tel Aviv, Israel.

Esther and Tobe were school children at that time. I was able to get Joseph into a trade school (an ORT school-SLMC via NPM note) and he learned there to be a tool and die maker and up to a certain grade- worldly knowledge. I left Warsaw in 1911 and the children were still very young. Two children Aaron and Prive are no longer living. Wolf and Esther live in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

### *My Wife, Sarah Leah, of blessed memory*

I can not recall her name with out tears. I do not have to describe her to both of you Sidney and Nina, because you were old enough to know and remember her. And to you Lillian I want to say that your greatest loss was that your mother went away (died) so young. She was wise and well educated. She was well read in Polish, Russian, and German literature, and they were considered by us in Warsaw as one language. And here in America, she even had time to become acquainted to some extent with English literature. She was in my estimation a highly cultured person, a gentle, good-hearted soul. A good wife, I looked up to her and learned from her. Unlike her sister Chaiush she was more sensitive and did not try to change me. Therefore our life together was really a Paradise on earth. It is a great loss that her years were short. I mourn her every day. She was my first and last love. I was 25 (27? SLMC-NPM note.) when I married her and she was the first woman in my life. She will be in my memory until my dying breath.

## *Myself*

I have not much to say about myself. I studied in Cheder until 13 and then I went to work in a wholesale notions store. I learned business and went for a short time to commerce school. My mother was more sick than well and I could not afford to pay tuition to the school. I did not serve in the army because of my nearsightedness. The Russians, at that time looked only for 100% healthy men. Later I married my first and never forgotten Sarah Leah. I was married in March 1904 (1906?-SLMC the ketuba states 5 Adar 5666). I worked all my life and as much as possible made a decent living. I was for a short time in Belgium and from there in August 1913 came to America. About two years later I was again united with my small family. After being here five years I became an American citizen. My first job was in a small department store on Milwaukee Ave. Later I became a presser of ladies cloaks. I peddled fruits and vegetables on the streets, winter and summer. Later I had a grocery and fruit store. In the depression of the thirties I bought a farm in Wisconsin with my last saved dollars. At that time Sidney was already a college graduate and Nina was going to Crane College. It is characteristic how your mother worried about Nina. I drew out the last \$800 from the bank and your mother allowed me to use only \$500 for business and the other \$300 we saved for her education. That money we used for tuition in Madison. At that time we discovered your mother's illness (breast cancer) and came back to Chicago.