



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, contact the Gombin Society by mail at 185 Skyline Drive, Highland Mills NY 10930 or by email. www.gombinsociety.org

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The officers and board members of the Gombin Society and their families send their greetings for a *freilechen Pesach*, 2008

Gombin Theater and Film; “Bright spots” then and now

This issue of *B'nai Gombin* is devoted to the rich tradition of theater and film connected to Gombin's Jewish community before the 2nd world war and involving today's Gombiners. This is not meant to be a scholarly study of the theater in Gombin, although such a study would be very welcome, should one of our 3rd generation Gombiners be willing to undertake it. Rather, we highlight some historical and contemporary examples of Gombiners telling the story of Gombin. Telling stories is part of the *Pesach* tradition.



Issue #22 – April 2008

“Bella’s Dream” a multimedia performance

By Dana Boll

Of the grandchildren of Bella and Raymond Boll, I was the granddaughter in the right place at the right time, the one who was near to them when they retired and began to talk more freely about their experiences surviving the Holocaust. So I listened often to their stories, taking notes.



In college, at the urging of a professor, I began to write a novel about them, but quickly became overwhelmed with the enormous challenge of being true to their story- the history of the war, of Gombin, of Poland, and connecting it all into a readable narrative without making it into fiction. I came away with a couple of chapters, an outline of a novel, and a big promise to myself that I would come back to the material someday when the time was right and I was ripe for the challenge.

This past Fall, over a year after my grandfather's passing, I began to re-think how to best represent their story, and bring it to life. Through online research, I came across a “one-page play” festival produced by the Jewish Theatre Workshop (JTW) in Baltimore: the theme- miracles.

For one page, you really need to boil a story down to its core. The core of their story and the one thing that anyone who has heard even a smattering of it knows is that: Grandma Bella had a dream that saved their lives. I had a title: "Bella's Dream." I submitted my short script and it was accepted for performance.

After the December production of the one-page version of "Bella's Dream," I was asked by JTW's artistic director, Yishai Friedman, to expand the work, and was given the opportunity to present the work-in-progress on April 16th for "On the Same Page Baltimore," a community reading initiative. "Bella's Dream" incorporates written text, voice-overs of recorded interviews, projected images, and dance/movement sequences, along with excerpts from the existing visual and poetic documentation of Gombin (an excerpt of Sam Rafel's footage and one of Rajzel Zychlinsky's poems).



“Bella’s Dream” (continued)

Theatre is a medium like no other: actors literally breathe and speak a story into life. What better way to honor my grandparents (and Gombin's legacy) than with a work of live theatre! My vision is to perform the full-length work in New York City after the script is expanded further.

In the meantime, I plan to interview more of the extended Boll family along with any willing Gombiners who have

memories of Bella and Raymond as a young couple. To contact Dana, or to be put on the mailing list, e-mail bellasdreamproject@gmail.com

This work is made possible in part by a Harkness Space Grant from the 92 Street Y Harkness Dance Center.

Dana Boll is a performer and choreographer, and one of the newest members of the board of the GJH&GS!



Umczek Kerber- The *Lilliput* of Gombin

From Minna Zielonka-Packer in Lodz, Poland minna.packer@gmail.com

The *Lilliput* movie- a narrative feature film inspired by the story of Abraham Kerber, a Jewish dwarf from Gombin, who survived the war by hiding in garbage cans for years at the Polish rail yards and deportation centers- is being filmed at this moment in Poland!



It has been my dream since I made the documentary, *Back To Gombin*, to be able to make a feature film about this interesting Gombiner, who knew my beloved late parents, Michael and Sonia Zielonka.

Abraham Kerber (nicknamed Umczek), earned the respect of many with his work as a professional photographer and artist, in Poland (before the war), Germany (after the war), and in Israel. This story about a little person, who was at the greatest risk for losing his life, not only by his status as a Jew, but also handicapped because of his dwarf stature, is a very special one. Amazingly, Abraham Kerber survived, and went on to lead a productive life in Israel until his death in 1978. I am honored to tell his story, in a narrative film.



When I was awarded the American Fulbright Scholarship to Poland, the opportunity to finally make this film a reality, presented itself. As with all film endeavors it's been costly and complicated, but I am proud to announce that the sneak peek, for which we shot 7000 linear feet in late February, on 35mm movie film, is now edited.

My veteran editor and friend, Harry Kafka, who was the editor on *Back To Gombin*, is a very special part of the process in this film-making endeavor. Harry's parents were in Auschwitz. I am very lucky indeed to work with someone who is so talented, and completely versed in Yiddish. Harry and Mimi Packer, my daughter, were co-writers of this special Jewish story.



Rob Stupay, son of Gombin Society board member, Arthur Stupay, designed and executed the wonderful website, so please visit the URL. Other Gombiners involved in the project include Joe Richards and Dana Boll, who will both be acting in the full film shoot, this summer.

The professional film crew and cast are comprised of a mix of American, Polish, Norwegian and other nationalities. The co-producer of *The Lilliput* is Sharon Levy from Australia and Israel. This multi-national endeavor speaks to the idea of mutual understanding for which the American Fulbright truly stands; I am indeed proud of that fact.

Support *The Lilliput* through your generous donation

You can assure the completion of *The Lilliput* and its release in 2009, by making a generous donation to the Gombin Society.

- For a contribution of \$150 a portion of your contribution will go towards your membership dues and the remainder will be used for the film production.
- For a contribution of \$250 you will receive a new DVD copy of *Back To Gombin* (distributed by The National Center for Jewish Film), along with your membership and your contribution to the making of *The Lilliput* movie!
- Contribute directly to *The Lilliput* at <http://www.thelilliputmovie.com>. The site accepts Paypal and all major credit cards.

The Lilliput, sneak peek, will be available at <http://www.thelilliputmovie.com>.

The Dramatic Circle of Gombin; *Theatre Polonja Gabin*

The Gombin *Yizkor* Book* was written by our parent's generation and published in 1969. The book reads from the left side in English and from the right in Yiddish; the first few articles are translations. There are, however, articles in Yiddish that are not translated, representing a rich source of information about Gombin. Among these articles is one written by Sidney Guyer about the Dramatic Circle- the Jewish theater in Gombin.



Sidney Guyer was active in the Gombin Library (Bibliotek) and in Der Dramatesher Krayz- the Dramatic Circle- as was his brother Max (back row, second from right), and Max's wife, Zelda Teifeld (seated at right with string of beads). Aida (Guyer) Cutler provided us with some photographs from her father's collection as shown here.

The Dramatic Circle of Gombin was founded in 1910 as an amateur theater company with *Chaim Luria* as its manager. Other founding members, pictured in the *Yizkor* book were *Yosef Schplaver*, *Herschel Levshinsky*, *Yitzchak Moshe Kva-Gayer*, *Label Drachman*, and *Hanech Goldschmidt*. Their first production was "*Kayneg Lear*", presumably a Yiddish translation of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, starring *Luria*. *Luria* was also described to have been a teacher in Gombin's evening courses. (Does anyone know what those were about?) The fact that they selected *King Lear* and had a Yiddish translation of *King Lear* speaks to the sophistication of the Gombin Jewish community.

In its early years, the Circle had to overcome many problems. Among these was finding a large enough space; in later years it appears that they had a theater hall. Also, among the elders of the community there was opposition to the youth taking part in theater. *Chanah Zychlinska's* father made a great deal of trouble for her and kept her from performing, although she later married *Yosel Celemenski*. Parents didn't want their children to become "*actyortchekes*," presumably a pejorative term for those swept up in the theater.

The *Yizkor* book article also has a reproduction of the playbill from the group's production of "*It's Hard to be a Jew*." This production took place on Saturday (after the end of *Shabbes*, no doubt), November 5, 1927 at the *Polonja* Theater. It's of great interest that the playbill is written in both Polish and Yiddish. One wonders if these plays were also attended by the non-Jewish Gombiners. In the cast were *Max* and *Zelda (Teifeld) Chaja (Guyer)*.

* Copies of the Gombin *Yizkor* Book are reproduced by the National Yiddish Book Center and are available from the Gombin Society at our web site www.gombinsociety.org

Dramatic Circle (Cont.): *Shver tsu zein a Yid* (Hard to be a Jew)



Teatr—POLONJA—Gąbin.
KOLEJ DRAMATYCZNE przy BIBLIOTECE
Powsz. Spoldz. Robotn. w Gąbinie.

PROGRAM

Sobota dnia 5-XI-27 roku.

„Trudno być żydem”
Sztuka ludowa w 3-ach aktach z prologiem.

— OSOBY: —

Dawid Szpiro	p. Ch. Zandman
Sara „jego żona	„ R. Gostyńska
Beti	„ Z. Tajfeldówna
Sjomke ich dzieci	„ Ch. Łącki
Sznajerson — student	„ M. Zajac
Iwanow	„ M. Wolman
Grynsberg	„ D. Blawat
Fratkin	„ A. Szczawiński
Hurwic — nauczyciel	„ M. Chaja
Kecele	„ S. Moczny
Starzy żandarm	„ M. Chaja

Studentoi, koleżanki Beti i żandarmy.

Reżyser—Ch. Zandman — Sufler—Ch. Hodys.

טעאטער פאלאניא גאמבין.
דראמאטישער קרייז פון דער ביבליאטעק
פון א.א.א. פאפולערע און ארבעטער
און ארבעטער און ארבעטער און ארבעטער

פראגראם

שבת ה' 5-XI-1927

שווער צו זיין א ייד
א פאלקס-שטיק אין 3 אקטן מיט א פראלוג.

פערזאנען:

היינריך שפירא
שרה „ זיין ווייב
בעטי (זייערע קינדער
סימאקע)
שניידמאן א סטודענט
איבאנוו
גרינסבערג
פראטקין
הורוויץ א לערער
קעצעלע
דער עלטערער פון זשאנדארמען
סטרענגען בעטיס חתונה, זשאנדארקן

רעזיסענט: דא. זאנדמאן
סולאט: דא. האדוויץ

Druk. Kijew i Teub-Platz 316-27

Photo from the 1927 production of “It’s Hard to be a Jew.” Zelda Teifeld is pictured.

Sidney Guyer ends his article with these words: “The Dramatic Circle was one of the *lichtekah punctn*- bright spots- of our *shtet!* It was, together with all of Gombin, snuffed out by the Nazi murderers.” One could say, however, that the new play by Dana Boll, Bella’s Dream, and the new film by Minna Packer-Zeilonka, The Lilliput, represent the rekindling of that light in our virtual Gombiner community.

The Gombin Jewish Historical & Genealogical Society

Renew your membership: US member- \$36_____ ; International member- \$36_____ ;

Student member- \$10_____ ; Board member- \$60_____.

Special donation for the Gombin Synagogue project:_____.

Special donation for the new film “Lilliput” project:_____.

Other special donations:_____.

Name (print) _____

Mailing address _____

Email address: _____

Make check to: **Gombin Society**. Mail to **185 Skyline Drive, Highland Mills NY 10930**



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