



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

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## Interview with George Nosal



*George Nosal at the age of 15 in a frame from the Rafel film of Gombin, with his aunt, Miriam (Manya) immediately to his left.*

George Nosal's mother was Bayla (nee Chaja) Nosal, who was born in Gombin in 1888 and died at Chelмно in 1942; may her memory be for a blessing. George is now a spritely 87-year-old and a marvelous storyteller and historian, whose dramatic life spans the tragic years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I had the great pleasure of spending a weekend with him in Toronto, chatting for hours, looking at old photos of Gombiners, and recording his stories. George is one of the remaining Gombiners who can tell us about life in our shtetl during the prewar period.

*Bernie Guyer* [See pages 2 & 3]

# George Nosal, Life of a Gombiner Son

Bayla Chaja married George's father, Moses Nosal, and settled in Kutno where the Nosal's were a wealthy family. Moses is described as a "playboy" who died in a motorcycle accident when George was only 5-years old. George spent his summers in Gombin with his cousins and friends and often visited Gombin over the years. He remembers the lakes and forests and fields, as well as the fun and friendships, including that with Stephen Drew, the son of Gombin's Dr. Dziewczepolski. George speaks often of Gombin's "beautiful" youth, with a sense of both joy and loss.



George (then called Yorek) appears in a frame of the 1937 Rafel film of Gombin. He was also able to identify frames with his mother, cousins, and other relatives. See the photo of 15-year-old George with his Aunt Miriam (Manya) Segal (nee Chaja).

George Nosal was a 16-year-old in September, 1939, when the Germans bombed the railroad yards at Kutno, a major rail junction in Poland. The Nazi army arrived shortly thereafter, and he escaped to Gombin where some German soldiers actually informed his family that they would be in danger under the Nazi regime. George then accompanied his Aunt Miriam (Manya), an uncle and some cousins on an odyssey that took them through Warsaw and Poland to the Russian border and eventually to Siberia. There he spent a year working as a lumberjack, surviving on starvation rations, but eventually being liberated when Russia declared war on Germany.

Nosal, then a mere 18 years old, undertook yet another odyssey that led to joining a unit of the reorganizing Polish Army in exile in Central Asia, a Russian army garrison in Persia, and then to join the British Army in Tehran. As part of the Polish unit in the British Army, he served in Iraq, Palestine, and Egypt, fought against Rommel's Nazi Army in Libya, and eventually was part of the British invasion of Italy under Viscount Montgomery. During these years, he met Gamal Nassar, then an Egyptian officer, and Saddam Husien in Cairo. What a story!

I'll gloss over his first marriage in Italy and eventual emigration to Canada. George Nosal returned to Poland in 1967, however, after volunteering and serving in the Israeli Army in the "Six-Day War." He went to Gombin and found old Polish friends who told grim stories of the war. He found an old relative, David Chaja, living in Saniki, where he had married a Polish woman after surviving the war in Russia.

# George Nosal interview (continued)

Over the last 40 years George returned often to Poland, maintaining Polish friendships, looking for Jews and engaging with Polish life and culture. In Toronto he reads Polish newspapers and writes letters to the editor protesting anti-Semitic ideas. He grows a garden with horseradish and arugula, and makes Polish jams from gooseberries and maintains a Polish diet, including the beloved herring. He lives with his son, Alex.



George Nosal is a living Gombin treasure.

More about George Nosal, including audiotapes of the interviews, is available at the Gombin Society web site, [www.gombinsociety.org](http://www.gombinsociety.org).

Miriam Segal, the Aunt with whom he survived the war, eventually went to Israel where she catered for the Gombin House in Tel Aviv. George told me that the pine trees that surround the Gombin House were planted by his Aunt Miriam with seeds from the Gombin forest. Miriam's son, Ze'ev Chai, lives in Israel.

## Dr. Dziewczepolski, Gombin's Jewish Doctor



Dr. Dziewczepolski (pronounced: Jeff-je-polski) graduated cum laude from the University of Warsaw and practiced internal medicine and gynecology in Warsaw and later in Gombin. He was remembered as a man of the highest ethical standards who was totally devoted to his profession, working days and nights. He was always willing to help people in need and often treated the poor for free and left them money for food and medicine. After the outbreak of World War II, he never returned to Gombin and was active in Warsaw until 1943.

Dr. Dziewczepolski's son survived the war fighting with the Russian army and came to the U.S. where he settled in California and took the name Steven Drew. He passed away in 2009. He reported that his father was last seen in the Majdanek Concentration camp in 1943.

## Dr. Martin E. Guyer (1940-2009)

My dear cousin Marty Guyer passed away Motzei Shabbat 14 November 2009 (28 Cheshvan 5770). A few days earlier he had been admitted to hospital in Detroit for chemotherapy treatment following a sudden relapse in his stomach cancer.

Marty's grandparents, Rev & Mrs Shmuel Guyer (Chaja) emigrated to Detroit in about 1929. His father Avram, a fervent Zionist, departed first for Palestine and then settled in Detroit in 1938.

Marty and Sheila were among the 8 members of the family who made the 1999 trip to Gombin.

Marty, a devout orthodox Jew, along with Sheila and his older sister Annie Friedman Guyer (born in Palestine) and his younger brother Dan, was very active in the Detroit Jewish community. His funeral was attended by well over 300 people— an indication of the deservedly high regard in which he was held. *Lawrence Guyer*



### From *The Yad Vashem Encyclopedia of the Ghettos during the Holocaust.*



On the eve of the World War II, about 2,300 Jews lived in Gąbin, representing roughly half of the town's population. Gąbin was occupied by the Germans on September 7, 1939; they immediately proceeded to plunder Jewish property and seize Jews for forced labor. In late September 1939, all of Gąbin's Jews were concentrated in the market square; they were beaten, and many were murdered. The synagogue and other Jewish buildings were set ablaze, and the Jews were required to pay a high fine. In early October 1939, the Jews of Gąbin were ordered to wear a yellow badge on their

clothing, and all the Jewish men were required to perform three days of forced labor each week (see photo). A six-member Judenrat headed by Moshe Venet was organized.

In early 1940, a ghetto was established in Gąbin. At first, the ghetto was open, which made it easier for its inhabitants to obtain food. The Jews worked in German institutions in the area. In 1941, the Germans began to deport Jews to various labor camps in Konin, Jedrzejew, and Hohensalza. In all, about 200 Jews were deported to labor camps, and many were later sent to Auschwitz.

The Gąbin ghetto was liquidated on May 12, 1942. First, on March 8<sup>th</sup> 1942, about 300 men were packed into a fire station, where they were held for twenty-four hours without food or water; some were shot and the survivors transported to the Konin labor camp. The approximately 1,800 remaining Jews were deported to the Chelmno death camp, where they perished. ***We remember them!*** *From Guy Miron, Editor-in-Chief, 2009. Submitted by Ada Holtzman (www.zchor.org)*

# A Voice from Gabin: Florkiewicz

*Email Received on: January 7, 2010*

*My name is Lukasz Florkiewicz and I live in the village of Grabie Polskie - near Gabin. I am 23 years old. A month ago I found your page on the internet and I am very surprised and interested in history of Gabin. I never heard about the film 'BACK TO GOMBIN' - I would like to see this film. I never heard about the Gombin Society.*

*I saw very interesting photos and a special person - Lea Florkiewicz. Do You know something more about this person? I... have almost the same surname - Florkiewicz.*

*I found also beautiful poetry. I am shipbuilder and I work in shipyard in Plock. But after work, I am a songwriter and recently made a melody for the lyric 'I REMEMBER' - By Rajzel Zychlinsky. That was automatic - like a lightning flash.*

*Sometimes I dream about a wonderful world - ideal world. And in my mind - my beautiful world looks like a small town (like a Gombin), where people live in tolerance and love. Poles, Germans, and Jews – meet in the market every Thursday, where everybody laughs and wish each other 'good day'... Unfortunately, that is only in my dreams.*

Listen to Lukasz's recording of his original music (mp3) for 'I remember' at [www.gombinsociety.org](http://www.gombinsociety.org)



"Hashomer Hatzay'ir" in Gombin (1934). From left to right: 1) **Welwek Friedland**, perished in the Holocaust. 2) **Moishe Zeidman**. 3) **Izhak Glickzeliger**. Dissapeared in Russia. 4) **Yosel Woideslawsky**. 5) A guest. 6) **Favesh Boll**, from the family of cobblers. Perished in the Holocaust. 7) **Lea Florkiewicz**. Survived in the Russian side, became a doctor of medicine and died recently in Israel. 8) **Meir Holtzman**. 9) **Motel Gelbert**, perished in the Holocaust. 10) **Leon Zaleshinski**, from Wolclawek. 11) **Efraim Biebergal**. 12) **Moshe Cermalinski**, (brother of the late **Sol Simon**) perished in the Holocaust. *We shall never forget.* Photo and notes from Ada Holtzman.

# Jewish Revival In Poland Today

*This report is from Minna Zielonka-Packer who participated in December 2009 in a panel, hosted by The Museum of Polish Jews in Warsaw, at the the Jewish Historical Institute. The event was made possible, in part through a grant from The Trust for Mutual Understanding.*

According to Michael Schudrich, Chief Rabbi of Poland; “20 years ago Jews could not safely identify themselves in public. Poles now no longer view themselves as victims of World War II. There is a growing feeling that Jews are a ‘missing limb’ in Poland. The level of anti-Semitism remains unacceptable, but the image of the murderous Pole seared in the consciousness of many Jews after the war doesn’t correspond to the Poland of 2010.”

This extraordinary statement was made during a panel discussion under the erudite guidance of Piotr Kowalik, associate director of the museum. Within the large gallery and set before a background of huge photographs of pre-WWII Jews in Poland, the group of eleven panelists included: Rabbi Michael Schudrich; Eleonora Bergman, director of The Jewish Historical Institute; Jerzy Halbersztadt, director of the Museum of the Polish Jews; Stanislaw Krajewski; professor of Philosophy, Warsaw University; Artur Hoffman, TSKZ Chairman; Helise Lieberman, program director of the Taube Center for Jewish Cultural Renewal and Poland Jewish Heritage Tours; Monika Krawczyk, FODZ Director; Adam Czyzewski, National Ethnographic Museum Director; Feliks Tych, professor of History, ZIH; and Malgorzata Lubinska, Beit Polska association chairman.

I had the opportunity to ask questions of this esteemed group, about the topic, as well as query individuals about their own path to reclaiming Judaism in their lives. Each spoke at length, revealing diversified opinions and

adjustments to being Jews in Poland. Differing levels of observance were described; from devote Orthodoxy to secular “allergic” Judaism. The contrasting answers revealed to me, as well as to the participants that Judaism in Poland today is a complex conundrum, but that it is a far cry from the Poland of yesteryear.

*The Museum of the History of Polish Jews will open in 2012 on the site of the former Warsaw Ghetto.*

I conclude that there definitely exists an intellectual and spiritual Jewish community in Poland. The community will grow, in part, because of the expansion and health of the relatively new Museum of Polish Jews in Warsaw, that has wisely helped illustrate the continuity of Jews in Poland with this stimulating discussion. It brought together various factions of the Jewish community. By simply talking and sharing, the event was seen to be a useful and needed platform by the attendees, and the suggestion was made that we reconvene next year.

I hope to return to Poland, both to shoot my feature film project, **The Lilliput** (see the sneak peek/trailer at <http://www.thelilliputmovie.com>), and revisit the panelists from this event, to discuss further the living form that is Jewish revival in Poland, now and for the future!

*From Minna Zielonka-Packer*

# Message from Arthur Gertzman, President

We have been active in fulfilling our core mission of preserving the legacy of the Jewish culture of Gombin. The 1937 Sam Rafael film about Gombin has been included in an educational film at the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial; we also provided the film to museums in both London and Mexico City.

The Gombin High School has sponsored a writing contest. A young Polish pupil requested our assistance in writing an essay on Jewish life in Gombin. She had already written about the history and destruction of the Gombin Synagogue. This indicates a willingness to teach the new Polish generation about the Holocaust and that Jews lived in Gombin for centuries.

Finally, a revival of Jewish life in Poland has begun. A chief Rabbi of Poland is now in place. Synagogues and schools are established

in Krakow and Warsaw. A recent *New York Times* article (“Changing Face in Poland: Skinhead Puts on Skullcap” 28 February 2010), tells the story of a Polish, neo-Nazi “skin head” who was born Jewish but did not know of his Jewish origins until told by a parent. He has become an observant orthodox Jew and with his Jewish wife, is raising two children in a Jewish home in Warsaw.

This year is the tercentennial of the construction of the Gombin Jewish Synagogue in 1710. My maternal grandparents were married there in 1904. The Synagogue was destroyed by the Nazi onslaught in 1939. While no Jews remain in Gombin today, the revival of Jewish life in Poland is one in a long chain of miraculous events that have sustained us these many centuries.

## 2010 Annual Meeting of the Gombin Society

**Sunday, June 6, 2010, 11am to 2 pm, brunch and meeting**

**Temple El Mekor Chayim, 338 Walnut St., Cranford NJ 07016**

Call 908-276-9231 for directions; Send check to Mindy Prosperi (address below)

Admission and brunch (in advance): \$5 per person, \$18 per family  
Or (at door) \$6 per person, \$20 per family. Children under 5 are free

## Support the Gombin Society in 2010

- \$1,000 – Gold Level
- \$500 – Silver Level
- \$60 – **Family Membership**
- \$36 – Contributor

Name & address & email \_\_\_\_\_

Check: The Gombin Society, c/o Mindy Prosperi, 185 Skyline Dr, Highland Mills NY 10930

Credit card payments via PayPal, please visit our website: <http://www.gombinsociety.org/>

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