

Survival stories of Kurenetzers

(Told to Eilat Gordin Levitan)

The Survival Story of Chaya Esther Reich (nee Gurevich):

I was born in Kurenets in 1923. My mother, Cheyena D'vorah, was born in Myadzyel in 1885 to Chaya Esther and David Wolf Gordon. Many Gordons from the Vilna region originated in the district of Myadzyel. The surname came to fruition when Jews were ordered to take last names by the leaders of the Russian Empire in 1815.

My mother's first husband was Yehoshua Leib Pliskin from Glubokie. They had two children: Shmuel was born in Glubokie in 1910 and Sonia Sara was born in Glubokie in 1912. Sometime in 1918 - just before the end of the First World War - Yehoshua Leib passed away of illness. My mother was left alone with two young children, ages eight and six, during very difficult years in the history of the region.

It was a very dangerous time for a woman to live alone. During those war years there was so much devastation, famine and illness. The region was at the front lines of the war for some years. It passed hands between the fighting forces nine times! First it passed from the Russians to the Germans and back until the First World War ended with the German defeat on November 11, 1918. Then after the Russian Revolution it was under the Bolsheviks' control. Finally, after wars between the Bolsheviks and Poland it passed to Poland in 1920. Most of the homes were broken and falling down. Most families hid in their broken homes, fearing the soldiers of the different invading armies during those years.

My father, Chaim Yisroel, was born in Kurenets to Sara nee Zimmerman and Zalman Uri Gurevich (My paternal brothers changed their last name from Gurevich to Horowitz when they came to the US).



Photo: Chaim Yisroel Gurevich

Before I was born, my father was a *Shochet* (a ritual slaughterer) in a village next to Kurenets named Zaneretz. His first wife was Toibe Raizsel. She was the daughter of the well known Shmuel Alperovich, who was nicknamed in Kurenets “The Angel” for his charity and many good deeds. My father had five boys and two girls with his first wife. The boys immigrated and settled in New Haven, Connecticut before my birth. Their names in the United States were Samuel (1887-1979), Joshua Heshe (1892-?), Maxwell (1893-1989), Abraham Elia (1895-1965) and Yizhak Elchanan (1896- 1982). There was a daughter named Leah, who was born in 1890 and lived in Kurenets with her husband, Zusia Benes. They had no kids. Leah’s sister’s name was Rivka.

In 1918 Toibe Raizel passed away. The Jewish tradition was that men should not live alone, even if they are sixty years old. My mother married my father, who helped her raise her two children from her previous husband at his home in Kurenets. I was born in 1923 to my mother, who was almost 40, and my father, who was about 65. Leah Benes, my half-sister on my father’s side, was about 33 when I was born. She and her husband Zusia, who lived next door to us in Kurenets, were like second parents to me (since they had no children). I was still a young child when my half-brother on my mother’s side left home. My brother Shmuel studied in a Yeshiva to become a Rabbi. He later migrated to the United States and was a rabbi in Baltimore. My maternal half-sister, Sonia Sara, married when she was still a teenager and lived with her husband and children in Dohinov.



Photo: Survivor Chaia Esther (age 93) with her son in 2016

My parents were strictly Orthodox. I grew up very sheltered. In September of 1939 the Soviets took control of our region. When I was sixteen, the Hebrew school changed to a Yiddish school. All Zionist activities had to stop. In June of 1941 the Nazis invaded our region. Soon after, we started hearing rumors that some Jewish communities in our area were being liquidated and all Jews, including women and children, were murdered. There were a few massacres of Jews in Kurenets and we were all very fearful. Just before Rosh Hashana of 1942, the Nazis surrounded Kurenets from all sides. We understood that they were going to murder us all. Most of the younger people decided to use the fog to try to avoid being detected by the Nazis and try to get to the forests and hide there. I hid in the forest for almost two years. Since much was already told by some of my cousins and others who hid and survived, I am not going to say much about it. I would rather talk about our extended family (mine and yours, Eilat).

My father had two brothers and three sisters:

1. My father's brother Mordechai (your great grandfather, Eilat, as you know) lived in Kurenets with his five children the year I was born. In the 1930s, Mordechai and his wife Frada followed four of their children: Meir Gurevich born in 1901, Batia Bender born in 1905, Sima Herbert born in 1911, Luba Bardan born in 1914. The children were all secular and devoted Zionists and socialists. During the 1920s (and some in the early 1930s) they settled in Kibbutzim and moshavim in Eretz Israel. My uncle's oldest son Nathan was also a secular Zionist. He lived in Kurenets with his 3 children: Leah born in 1922, Zalman born in 1924 and Gershon born in 1928.

They all (other than their mother Batia) survived the Holocaust by hiding in the forest and joining the partisans. After the war they made Aliyah to Israel.

2. My father's brother Yankel, born in 1878, changed his last name to Spector and moved to Vilna to avoid service in the Russian army. He was the husband of Rachel Leah nee Brik. They were the parents of Yitzchok Spektor, who passed away before the war. Their daughter Rivka was born in 1905. She was for a few years a teacher in the Hebrew Tarbut school in Kurenets. She was married to the well known artist David Labkovski, a painter of Jewish images. They were revolutionary in their youth and chose to live in the Soviet Union, which was a lucky move during the war. After the war ended they made Aliyah to Israel and settled in Zfat, where they passed away in the early 1990s. They had no children. Zlata/Zahuva was born in 1906. She was married to Reuven Reznik. As the war started, she and her twin babies were planning to join her husband, who had moved to South Africa. However, it turned out that it was too late. They were not able to obtain visas after the Soviets took control of the area. They perished in the Holocaust in Vilna with her parents. Arthur Abraham Spektor was born in 1908. He immigrated to South Africa and married Sally Mauarberger. They had four children: Patricia Kaimowitz, Robert, Barbara Barishman and Norman.

3. My father's sister Perla was born in Kurenets in 1880. She was married to Nathan Einbinder and had 3 children: Maryashka Rebecca Shapiro born in 1905, Jacob born in 1912 and Eli Tzvi born in 1913. In the early 1920s they moved to the United States and settled in New Haven, where many other Kurenetzers lived including some of Perla's nephews. Perla passed away in New Haven in 1964. Some of the grandchildren became well known rabbis of Chabad in the United States.

4. My father's sister Liba was born circa 1870. She was married to Yoel Shafer, a teacher of the Talmud High school in Vileika. They lived in Kurenets with their children: Rishka born in 1899, Israel born in 1900 and Alonzik born c 1905. Yoel Shafer passed away c 1930. Liba passed away of old age the week the Nazis entered Kurenets in June of 1941. Rishka married Ziska Sokolinski from Koblinik. They lived in Postavy and they were merchants. They had three children: Sara born in 1919, Avraham born in 1922 and daughter Michell born in 1928. The entire family perished in 1942 in Postavy, murdered by the Nazis. Israel married Etel and they had two sons. Yoel was born in 1931 and Michl was born in 1933. Israel Shafer was a watchmaker. Israel was known in Kurenets for his great sense of humor. Tragically, Israel was checking on his sister who was living in Postavy in 1942 and was murdered there by the Nazis. His wife was murdered in Kurenets on September 9, 1942. The two sons, Yoel age 11 and Michl age 9, escaped to the forest and were able to hide there for almost a year. Eventually they became sick and died of

starvation. Alonzik Shafer left Kurenets for Argentina years before the war. For a while he kept in touch with his first cousin Aharon Meirovitz (the editor of the Kurenets Yizkor book). Yoel Shater was the brother of Aharon's mother Perla Meirovitz nee Shafer. Aharon told me that all connection with his cousin Alonzik Shaffer in Argentina was lost a few years after the war.¹

5. My father's sister Chana was born circa 1879. She was married to Elchanan *HaKatzav* (the latter was a title referencing the fact that he owned a kosher butcher shop in Kurenets). Chana perished on the day of the Kurenets massacre. Her husband Elchanan died of natural causes before the Holocaust.² Note from Eilat: Chaya Esther Reich had a hard time speaking to me about Chana's family. All she said was that a young grandson of Chana who was about four or five years old survived a blockade in the forest but his parents, Chaim and Shoshka, and his sister were killed. Chana said that the child later hid with the Russian partisans and she knew nothing else about him.

I remembered Shimon Zimmerman's story about the son of Chaim and Shoshka. Shimon wrote:

"After two months, this idyllic stage of hiding in relative safety ended. One morning our contact, Roman, with his son, came and told us that the Germans knew of our hiding places and that we must leave immediately. We had no choice, so we took our belongings and put them on our two sleds, one of which I had bought from a farmer. We went to more hidden away woods and fixed up a place to sleep. With the first morning lights we were awakened by shots. The Germans surrounded us. This was the first blockade. From the shots we understood that they were closing in on us. We had no time to think. We had to try to go through the ring of the Germans or go across an area that was clear of brush that was approximately 500 acres in size. We guessed that the Germans had come from Andreiky and surrounded the woods from three sides. The

¹ All the information about the Shafer family was given to me (Eilat) by Aharon Meirovitz, born in 1910. We spoke many times about 20 years ago. He also told me about his direct family. He, his three sisters and his brother Michael grew up next door to his uncle Yoel Shafer (the brother of his mother) and his wife Liba. He still remembered my great great grandfather Zalman Uri Gurevitz, who moved with his daughter Liba when he was very old. It was after his wife Sara passed away. Aharon recalled that he passed away c 1920. Aharon's younger brother Michael, who was a member of Hashomer Hatzair and wanted to make Aliyah to Israel, was not able to do it in time. Michael was murdered by the Nazis alongside his father, Ben Zion, the beloved teacher. His sister Fruma Varfman (born in 1903) perished with her husband and daughters, Bashinka and Perla, in 1942 in Kurenets. Another sister, Leika, died before the Holocaust and so did his mother, Perla. Aharon and his sister Sarah Eisen (born in 1918) made Aliyah to Israel before the war. Aharon was a poet. He helped other Kurenetzers who survived by recording, editing and publishing their memoirs. He implored me to include more stories, pictures and information from survivors and their family members.

² The information here is from a note by Eilat Gordin Levitan, based on a phone call with Israel Alperovich, the grandson of Elchanan.

fourth side that was the part clear of trees was also clear of Germans. The Germans did not believe that anyone would try to go there. Despite the clear danger, I decided to cross that area, thinking that since the Germans were at least 600 meters away they would have a hard time catching us. Riva and I were the first to cross the clearing crawling. The snow was melting and in some areas its height was one meter. Above our heads the bullets whistled. But we had no choice, we had to continue. We were already in the middle of the clearing and could see a wooden area with no Germans, and then a bullet hit me in my left knee. My boot was filled with blood. I couldn't move and I begged Riva to go on without me. I lifted myself up praying that the Germans would kill me and not catch me alive. But Riva caught me and pulled me to the direction of the woods. Exhausted, we reached the woods. There we met some people that succeeded to cross the prairie. I tore my clothes to stop the blood. We had no medicine or first aid kit. The sun went west and the Germans stopped shooting. All of a sudden I saw in the path made by me being dragged across the snow, a very tiny image slowly walking towards us. This was four year old Lazerke, son of Chaim Alperovich. From far away he saw us and followed behind. We waited for him to reach us. His father, mother and little sister were killed and he was the only one left from his entire family. We didn't have enough time to recover him and we heard a horse with a sled coming. Everyone ran away but Riva and I stayed because I couldn't move. The horse came right next to us. Riva caught the horse that the Germans must have lost. Inside the sled we found furs that must have belonged to a farmer. We called our friend Itzka Londers, and he took us back to our hiding place.”

I (Eilat) could not let go of the information. My family left a young boy who survived in the Soviet Union and no one could tell me what happened to him after the war ended? After asking everyone I already spoke with before about him, I found out that they did not know anything else about him. I implored them to ask others who were there. I was directed to Israel Alperovitz, who shared first cousins with my mother (Leah, Zalman and Gershon Gorev/Gurevich). My mother was related to them on their father's side and Israel was related to them on their mother's side.

The survival story of Israel Alperovich:

Israel was born in Kurenets in 1923. His father, who he was named after, died in tragic circumstances before he was born. Yisrael the father was the son of Elchanan *HaKatzav* and his first wife. Chana, the sister of my great grandfather Mordechai, was Elchanan's second wife. Chaim, the father of Leizerke (the young boy who survived) was the half brother of Israel's father.

Israel's mother Sarah, daughter of Pinchas Aishisk,i was the sister of Batia Gurevich nee Aishiski (my mother's first cousin's mother, Batia was the mother of Leah, Zalman and Gershon). Israel had two older siblings: Zeev born in 1919 and Ela born in 1921. In spite of the fact that Israel was orphaned from his father, he had a happy childhood. He had many uncles, aunts and cousins from both sides of his family and he also had grandparents and loving older siblings. Israel was a friendly child and had many friends his age in Kurenets.

Israel wanted to explain to me why the family let the Soviet partisans take care of young Leizerke, the son of his uncle Chaim. The best chance of survival for a young Jewish child homeless and hiding in the forest in very cold winters was with the Soviet partisans who had food and camps in the forest. Most of the young Jewish men who did not have families to take care of joined the Soviet partisans (if they were willing to accept them). Others who had young children had to build underground shelters and endangered their lives almost daily going to gentile farmers who lived in the outskirts of the forests asking for food. At that point a few Jewish children who were alone in the forest passed away of starvation and illness (including the second cousins of Leizerke, the orphaned grandsons of Liba Shafer, the sister of Chana, Leizerke's paternal grandmother). As the Nazis lost the war in that area, the Jewish survivors left the forests in the summer of 1944 trying to rebuild their lives and as soon as the Western areas were freed in 1945 they left the Soviet Union if they could . All men below a certain age were called to serve in the Red Army immediately after the area of Kurenets was freed by the Red Army in the summer of 1944. Some fought the Nazis, chasing them all the way to Berlin. Others fought Nazi collaborators and others in Belarus under Soviet rule. Israel was the sole survivor of his immediate family. His mother Sarah, his older brother Zeev and his sister Ela perished in Kurenets on September 9, 1942. All his uncles and aunts on his mother's side perished (see the story of his first cousin Moshe Kremer). His mother's brothers, Mordechi and Gershon Eishiski, perished with their wives and all their children. His mother's sister,s Batia Gurevitz and Chana Kremer, perished. Batia's husband Natan survived with children Leah, Zalman and Gershon (they all made Aliyah to Eretz Israel). From the children of Chana and her husband Mendel Kremer, Moshe Kremer and his sister Eshka survived and her step daughter Bushka survived as well as her step grandchildren Yehoshua and Miri (they were the children of Baruch Kremer who perished). Yehoshua Kremer was killed while fighting during the War of Independence.

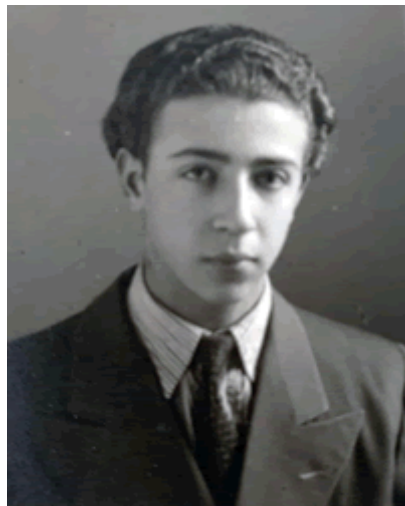
On his father's side, those who perished included his uncle Chaim with his wife Shoshka and daughter Chiena, his uncle Yosef Alperovich with wife Feiga and son Moshe age 5, and his aunt Rivka. His uncle Hirshel perished along with his wife Dishka (a teacher). His aunt Tzirka survived with son Zalman. They made Aliyah to Israel and lived in Nazareth Ilit. Zalman had two sons.

Israel did not know where the young child Leizerke was when he looked for him after returning from army service. By then, all the relatives left the Soviet Union. He was unable to leave the

Soviet Union until there was permission for former Polish citizens to move to Poland. In 1958, just before he left the Soviet Union for Poland, he was able to find Leizerke. He wanted to tell him that he could move to Poland and from there immigrate to Israel. It turned out that Leizerke grew up in a Soviet orphanage. Leizerke showed little interest in his Jewish relatives who he did not remember. That was the last attempt of connection of the family to Leizerke as far as the survivors knew. I am still hoping to find some information about Leizerke.

Israel married and had children They came to Israel in 1958. Israel had a happy life in Israel. He never forgot Kurenets and gave hundreds of Yad Vashem reports for the residents of Kurenets.

The Survival Story of Mendel (Marvin) Fidler and his parents, Yitzhak and Chana



In September of 2021 I received an email from Mina Nemirov. She wrote:

Dear Eilat Gordin Levitan,

My father, Marvin (Mendeil) Fidler and I were very happy to discover your website commemorating the people of Kurenets. My father is almost 91 years old (born 1931) and survived in the woods about 20 km outside of Kurenets with his parents Chanah Fidler (nee Piastonovich, born 1898, died 1972) and Yitzkhak Fidler (born 1898, died 1975). He is the only one of their 4 children that survived. Sara Fidler died by lightning in their home in 1940 at the age of 14/15 and his sister Mina was murdered by the Nazis in a roundup in Vilayka in 1942. His brother, Isser was caught by the Nazis while he was with the resistance and perished in 1943.

We are sharing photos my father has. The first 2 pictures of the men standing in the grave with the group of people and the one with the horse, I think are additions to other pictures you have of the town people properly burying those that perished. The two pictures of the groups of men were taken in Germany in 1947. These are all Kurenets survivors who relocated to Germany and were in displacement camps and later made their way to the US and Israel. In the picture with the wall, my grandfather, Yitzhak Fidler is in the rear, 5th from the right. And Charles Gelman (wrote a book about his survival. Was known in Kurenets as Chezkel Zimmerman) stands in the front left and directly behind him is Velvel Rabunski.

My answer:

I would love to add the survival story of your father and his parents, as well as pictures and information about your relatives from Kurenets. Many years ago I created a tree on Geni.com for both sides of your family. The tree of the Fidler's side is based on the story about the Fidler family of musicians which includes information about the grandfather of your father, Isar Fidler, his siblings and their parents. The information on your grandmother's side is based on Yad Vashem reports by Levik Alperovitz. His sister Nacha married Yaakov Leib Pistanovicz, the brother of your grandmother Chana. According to the Yad Vashem reports they were the children of Pesach and Mina. Mina passed away long before the Holocaust since at least two of her granddaughters (oldest of Yaakov Leib, and oldest sister of your father) who were born in the 1920s were named after her³ (both perished as teenagers). Maybe Pesia, the youngest Daughter of Yakov Leib Pistonovicz who also perished in the Holocaust was named for her grandfather Pesach. The two sons of Yaakov Leib and Necha were Yechezkel and Zalman who were named after members of Nechas family. Thanks.

³ It is an Ashkenazi Jewish custom to name babies after deceased ancestors, not living ancestors.





Photos: From the email from Mina Nemoriv, Marvin Fidler's daughter

I also spoke with Marvin Fidler directly. Since Marvin already had his very detailed story recorded by the Steven Spielberg Foundation (which is available online), we mostly spoke about two of his young cousins who also survived in the forests near Kurenets. On his father's side we spoke about his first cousin Chaim Dimenshtein, the son of Maszha nee Fidler (the sister of his father). Chaim was born in 1933 in Cholopy, a small farming village next to Kurenets. Chaim survived as a child hiding in the forest near his home for two years. After the war he stayed in the Soviet Union and had a family. Many years later he immigrated to Israel, where he passed away in 2017.



Photo: Chaim Dimenshtein

On Marvin's mother's side we spoke about his cousin Mendel Rabunsky, who was born in Kurenets in 1927. Mendel's mother was Leike (Leah Liza) nee Pistonovicz and was the sister of Chana, Marvin's mother. Mendel's father was Yizhak Rabunski. His brother Shmuel was born in 1921 and his sister Chaia was born in 1924. I heard about her from my mother's first cousin Zalman Uri Gurevich. He was her classmate and her good friend. He said that she was very nice looking and smart. Sadly only Mendel survived. His parents and siblings perished in the Holocaust. His brother Shmuel (Mula) joined the partisans and took Mendel with him to fight for the resistance. Tragically, Mula was killed while fighting.



Photo: Mendel Rabunsky

We also spoke about Marvin's aunts and uncles who came to the United States before the Holocaust.

After the liberation of the area by the Red Army in the summer of 1944, Marvin and his parents came out of their hiding place in the Naarutz forests. They returned to Kurenets, where they united with other Jews who survived. They reburied the Jewish victims and felt that it was too painful to try to rebuild their life in Kurenets. As soon as Germany was freed from the Nazis, they and other families from Kurenets left the Soviet controlled area for a refugee camp in the American controlled area in Germany. They waited there for a few years to get visas for either Palestine or the United States. After a few years of being refugees, with the help of their parents and siblings in the US, they received the desired visas and settled in the New York area. Today Marvin lives in New Jersey next to his good friend Natan, also a survivor.

I spoke to Natan many years ago. He is related to me via his mother Mina nee Sosensky, who was a second cousin of my grandmother, Bela nee Shulman.

Natan Kasdan was born in Glubokie to Mina (daughter of Chana and Nachum Sosensky) and Yosef (son of Fruma and Avraham Kasdan of Kurenets). Natan had a younger sister named Chanale. Shortly before the war, Natan's beloved mother Mina passed away after a short illness. Chanalel was still a toddler and it was difficult for Yosef to take care of her on his own. He went to the Kurenets/Ilya area (where he had some cousins and also brothers and sisters in law) and

there he found a wife. He married Fruma Zira Alperovitz, the daughter of Chana Pesia nee Ginsburg and Avraham Chaim Alperovich⁴

Yosef Kasdan brought his new wife back to Glubokie. His son Natan did not like his stepmother. He was very upset and asked to live with the family of his mother. The father took him to Kurenets to live with Natan's aunt Riva Tzirulnik (Cirulnik) nee Sosensky, born in 1902. Riva was the sister of Natan's mother. Her husband was Yitzhak and they had two sons: Shimon born in 1922 and Avraham born in 1926. Natan's cousin Shimon was a very bright guy and an active member of the socialist Zionist movement, *Hashomer Hatzair*. As soon as the Nazis arrived in the area, Shimon organized a Jewish resistance cell in Kurenets with his younger friends from *Hashomer Hatzair*. They printed flyers calling for resistance, which they secretly spread in the region and made contact with non Jewish former communist (read Zalman Uri's story for details). Sadly Shimon was reported to the Nazis as a communist and was taken to a camp, where he was killed shortly after.

On the day of the Kurenets Massacre, Natan's aunt had just a minute to tell Natan to be silent and to cover him with blankets when the police knocked on their door. She knew that they would not look for him since he was not registered as their child in Kurenets. Natan was able to escape and hide in the forest. At one point he united with his father, who had also escaped.

In the Yizkor book of Glubokie, Tzvi Rier wrote about Natan's father Yosef Kasdan during the time they hid in the forest:

"We found some other Jews after wandering around in the forest for a few hours: Eli Gordon and his family, Alia Padnos, Yosel Kasdan, who had been with me in the pit, Chaim–Meir Bipkin (a young boy). Later, Motke Genshteyn, Meir Bliachman, Motke Markman, and others arrived. Gordon's wife, Vichne, gave me a shirt. The Jews had built a primitive bath and heated it in honor of the 'guests.' I washed up and put on my 'new' shirt. I felt human again! They were well entrenched in Zemliankes and in Beidelech (primitive huts)."

After the liberation, Yosef and his son Natan came to the United States. Yosef married another Holocaust survivor from Kurenets. Her name was Chaya Ida, the daughter of Freidke Belka and Arie Leib Ziskind. She was married first to Chaim Lewin who perished in Kurenets. She survived

⁴I helped Ann Chana Sharoni, the daughter of Fruma Zira's sister Fanny to find information about her father Yosef Shmukler. Her mother Fanny (Feiga) is the only survivor from the siblings of Fruma Zira. Fanny lost her first husband Peretz Zeidenkop and their toddler daughter Batsheva age 3 in the Shoah. Batsheva was named after her grandmother Batsheva nee Kremer, who was the sister of Moshe Eliezer Kramer who brought Chabad To America (read his story in the Yizkor book). After the liberation Fanny met a survivor from Vileyka by the name of Yosef Shmukler who also lost his family. They were married and had a daughter Ann in Germany, where they were living in a refugee camp waiting for visas. Shortly after In 1947, Yosef Shmukle was killed .

with their son Zelig Lewin, her parents Arie Leib and Freidka Belka and her 3 sisters: Zina Zelda Kuperberg (born in October of 1926), Rivke Siegman and Dverke Dora (born in 1925 married another Kurenets survivor David Motosov - see his story in the Yizkor book) Dora had 2 daughters and a son Moti Inbar, who wrote me. They lived in Haifa. I spoke with Dora Matosov and her daughters many years ago. She as well as her sisters told their survival story to the Steven Spielberg foundation The only son of Arie Leib and Freidke Belka was Mordechai Ziskind, who was born in 1916. Mordechai joined the resistance and was killed in May of 1944 about a month before the liberation.

The Survival Story of Dvora nee Rubinstein:

From a phone conversion with Dvora of Ness Ziona, Israel in 2000:

Dvora nee Rubinstein was born in Rezke in the early 1920s. Technically she was born in Kurenets, at my (Eilat) great grandparents house (Mordechai Gurevitz and Freydel nee Alperovitz). Her grandmother Rachel, the wife of Chaim Baruch Gordon, was a relative of Mordechai's from his father's side (Zalman Uri Gurevitz). Since there was no midwife in Rezke, her mother was taken to Kurenets to deliver her babies. When Dvora was growing up, there were about twenty Jewish families in Rezke. Some names included:

- The Gordon Family: Dvora's mother had a brother, Berl Gordon, who married Gitel nee Rubin from Dolhinov. Her mother had a sister, Asna Kaplan, who had a daughter Rachel. They all perished with her father and the three children he had with his second wife from the Fiddler family of Kurenets. The Fiddler family was known in the entire area as Musicians. Only one brother, Yizhak Fiddler, his wife Chana and their son Mendel Marvin survived. See his story in this chapter.

- Chodesh Family: Rabbi Chaim Meir and Liba nee Alperovitz Chodesh (died recently), their daughter Judy of Philadelphia. A relative of his, Batia Chodesh lives in Chedera, Israel and speaks only Yiddish or Russian. The sister and mother of Shabtai Gordon, who lived in Kurenets also lived in Rezke. Shimon Zimmerman, the head of the Kurenets society in Israel was the husband of Shabtai's daughter Riva. He lives in Kfar Charif in Israel. Rivka Feygelman was the married name of Shabtai's sister. Rivka and Shabtai perished together with their family in Kurenets. Shabtai's older daughters Riva Zimmerman and Michla who married Arye (son of Alter Zimmerman from Kurenets) were the only survivors from the entire family. Their husbands and children live in Israel.

- The Salzman Family: they were well off and the mother was from the United States. Before the war they moved to Vileyka. Their son Yaakov lives in the United States. He went many times to Rezke and has pictures. Shimon Zimmerman and him went for a visit there together and can provide his phone number.

- Mendel Levin Family and the Zichok family, whose daughter just came from Russia to Israel. There are still some other family members in Russia. The family of Yehuda Alperovitz (Liba Chodesh from Philadelphia was his daughter)

Dvora said that there was not a Dinerstein family there when she lived in Rezke. (Steve Rosen has a list of fifty Dinersteins who lived there in 1838)

Rezke was known for the mountains, where people would sled and ski in the winter. It also had rivers. Most of the people in the area were not Jewish. They had a heder where Dvora went to school. Her grandfather Chaim Baruch Gordon was very educated in Jewish studies and he would teach her. She told me that her grandmother would tell her that her father used to live and work for the wealthy Pariz (the nobleman and big land owner in the area). Dvora's great grandfather found out that Chaim Baruch, who was studying in the Yeshiva in another town, was a very learned man and chose him for his daughter (her grandmother) even though he was a hunchback.

One of the teachers in Rezke was Ben Zion Meirovitz from Kurenets. His son Aharon is a writer in Israel. Dvora did not study with Ben Zion Meirovitz because her family said that he was not religious enough. He was a great teacher who made his students speak in Hebrew and many became Zionists with his support. The Rabbis also came from other places, mostly from Kurenets. They buried the Jews mostly in the cemetery in Kurenets.

Dvora's mother died when she was eight years old. She was buried in Vileyka because she was taken there to the hospital. Eight year old Dvora organized a minyan to say Kaddish for her mother every day for the first year.

The school in Rezke was only up to four grades and then many children went to school in Kurenets or Vileyka. Dvora did not have the opportunity to attend high school because the family could not afford to pay for it. That was during the Polish time. However, after the Soviets entered the area, she had new opportunities of going to school since she was from a working class family. The Soviets gave preferred admission to children from working class families and school and lodging was free for them. In 1941 Dvora worked and studied in Vileyka.

Her father was a "glass man." When the Germans invaded the area, she was sent with other workers to the Vileyka train station to put some important Soviet papers on the train to Russia. She and others were pushed to the train by a Soviet officer who said to her, "You are a Jew and a Communist. You must leave." The non-Jewish people jumped off the train. Dvora stayed with nothing but the summer dress she was wearing. She never saw her family or Rezke again. She

told me much more about her very interesting life as a refugee. Later, when the war ended, she received a letter in Russia from the Chodesh family that her entire family had perished. She decided to leave Russia and go to the west. She became an illegal immigrant crossing many borders without papers. Eventually she met her later-to-be husband in Poland in 1945, right when the war ended. They were right near the Kielce incident, where a mob of Polish soldiers, police officers, and civilians murdered at least 42 Jews and injured over 40 in the worst outburst of anti-Jewish violence in postwar Poland. On the day of the Polish Pogrom, amongst those who were killed there were about twenty Jews that came back from the Holocaust and were with Dvora on the same train the day before. Two years and many refugee camps later, on an illegal boat to Israel she saw the lights of Haifa, but was taken to the camp in Cyprus by the British and somewhere there she had a daughter.

The Survival Story of Yente Rudnitsky-Baranovitch nee Dinerstein and her sister. Rachel:

I called the sisters Rachel and Yente nee Dinerstein in Cholon, Israel. Here is some information that I received from the sisters:

Their father was Leib, son of Gotza Dinerstein. He had two brothers. One was Artzik Aharon Dinerstein from Kurenitz. On 9-9-1942 he was hiding with his wife and children in the ground by his house. He asked them to run to the forest and they refused. He left for the forest, telling them he will return to take them after they realize that it is safer there. They refused to go and were found and killed by the Germans. Arzik was killed in 1944, days before the liberation.

The other brother lived and perished in Volozhin with his family. His name was Natan Dinerstein. Yente's father had a first cousin in Vileyka named Moshe Natan Dinerstein. His son Fibel came to Israel and lived in Zur Shalom. They still have a family there. Yente told me that she lived with them for a few weeks when she took a class on how to use the Zinger sewing machines that her father sold in Vileyka. There was also the family of Noach Dinerstein, who was a partisan from Vileyka and had relatives in Kurenets.

Yente's father also had three sisters: One was Nechama, who married Aharon Arka Alperovitz. They perished with their daughter in Kurenets. Many wrote about Arka's fighting and overcoming one of the policemen that took him to be killed. Another sister was Chaya Rocha Rogozin, who lived and perished in Smorgon. The third sister was from Molodechna and her name was Chana Ashinovski. She has a daughter named Zvia Mishkin, who lives in Rehovot, my hometown in Israel.

From the mother's side: the mother was from the Gurfinkel family. Their first cousins were Michael and Batia Rivka Gurfinkel, who perished, and their brother Yitzhak, who lives in a Kibbutz in Israel. Yente wrote a chapter in the Yizkor book about her survival. You can read more about the Dinerstein family in the Yizkor chapter about the Vostok territory, written by Abraham Aharon, son of Naftali Alperovich. Here is a section about their uncle Artzik:

"I also remember Artzik (son of Gutzes) Dinerstien. He had a huge fur coat that he never separated from. When we were walking through the forest, we felt very sorry for him. He kept tripping over his coat. But we were very jealous during the cold nights. After many, many troubles and wandering, we passed the old Russian-Polish border, the border prior to 1939. We passed near Pleshentznitz, about 10 km from Poloshnitz. A few days later, the first snow fell. We didn't dare go to the local homes. We slept in the forest. The weather was very cold and only one person had the appropriate clothes: Artzik, the owner of the fur coat."

Yente and Rachel had a brother named Gershon who made Aliyah to Eretz Israel and settled in Rehovot long before the Shoah. His son Prof. Ariel Dinar (nee Dinerstein) told me about his aunt Rachel. She had a child with Dr. Tzrinski, who lost his wife and children during the Nazi massacre in Kurenets on 9/9/1942. The boy was born while they were in the forest fighting the Nazis as members of the Soviet resistance. After the war ended Dr. Tzerinski took the child to Germany. Ariel was in touch with the child's son, who lives in Germany..

The Survival Story of Rachel Frydman (née Alperowicz):

Rachel was born in Kurenets on May 8, 1926, to Chaya Leah (born in Volozhin in 1900 to Rachel and Moshe Bunimovitz) and Avraham Alperovich. Rachel discussed her life in Kurenets before World War II in a video for the Steven Spielberg Foundation.

Some highlights from her story: After the Nazis invasion in June of 1941, there was not a Jewish ghetto in Kurenets because it was so small and almost the entire population was Jewish. The Germans arrived abruptly in June 1941. Her sister Chana (later Galinsky) immediately left with a neighbor to cross the old border deep into Russia. She survived and came to Israel after the war. There was no full government established yet, only the army (she did not say that already on the first day the Germans arrived, they took 3 Jewish young men, cousins name Zimmerman, and murdered them right outside the town). She shared that once the Gestapo came, gold and silver was demanded from everyone via the Jewish Committee. Rachel discussed the selection process, during which individuals age 16 and up were taken away. She discussed being made to work (they were not taken away. They were taken in the morning and returned in the evening.

Only months later they were taken to Vileyka and Luban a few kilometers away. There they stayed in camps). Rachel stated that just before the High Holiday,s approximately 50 men and a few women, including her neighbors across the street and two cousins, were slaughtered in the streets and how one man escaped.⁵

Yenta Dinerstein, who I spoke with, watched her husband being killed and they were going to kill her and their baby. The Polish mayor of the town came running and asked the Nazi head officer to let Yente and her baby go. The Nazi did it, saying to Yente "Next time don't marry a communist." The man Rachel said was not killed was Yankale, son of Artzik Alperovich. He arrived after they had already murdered most of the men. When he heard that they were killed for being communist, he said, " Ask all the locals here. My father was sent to Siberia. Why would I be a communist?" I (Eilat) spoke to his brothers, who were among the last family who lived in Kurenets after the war.

Rachel also spoke in her interview about the specific men who committed atrocities. She spoke about working as a cleaning lady. She also spoke about the liquidation three days before the High Holidays, hiding with her family in a false attic her brother had built, a non Jewish neighbor reporting on them to the Germans and a Jewish family down the street committing suicide by starting a fire on the day of the killing, 9-9-1942.⁶ Rachel also spoke about sneaking out of the attic and hiding in the woods and losing track of her brother. She spoke about living in a hole in the ground with 18 people, her mother being caught one winter night. Sheina Liba Cheres and her mother Chaya Lea Alperovitz went back to Kurenets to get clothes and food for the children. They were caught by German collaborators and tortured but refused to tell where the Jews were hiding. They were killed on the spot. Rachel was now alone in the forest. A family with 3 kids from Kurenets let her join them. The forest was divided by numbers and each village had a part of the forest. The Germans surrounded their area of the forest on April 29, 1943. She spoke about escaping the Germans, not joining partisan groups but making them food, the rainy summer of 1943 and hearing that her brother Moshe was alive in the Vilna ghetto. Rachel also spoke about going to several villages before returning to the woods, hearing that her brother was sent to Estonia, and later hearing that he was not. He escaped and joined the resistance. Rachel started searching for her brother Moshe Alperovich in villages and

⁵ They were 54 people. They were not killed in the street, they were taken to the forest. It was during Simchat Torah of 1941. They were people who had a good job when the Soviets were there and their wives, mothers and kids.

⁶ It was my grandfather's first cousin Ethel nee Gurevitz and her husband Zusia Benes, well off Jews with no children. They decided to kill themselves and burn their home so the Nazis would get nothing. Etel's youngest sister Esther Reich, survived and lived in New Haven.

partisan groups. She spoke of the happiness of finding him in the forest. She also shared that she was shot at by German soldiers but avoided being hit by running in a zig-zag.

List of Kurenetzers' Testimonies that were recorded by Spielberg's Shoah Foundation:⁷

Frydman, Rachel (nee
Rachela Alperowicz
Date of Birth 5/8/1926
Hiding or living under false identity (Location) Niewiary (Poland)
Narocz Forest (Poland)
Rudnicka Puszcza Forest (Poland)
Location of liberation Narocz Forest (Poland)
Other Experiences displaced persons camp in Germany Length of Interview 3 hours

Fidler, Marvin
Mendel born in 1931

Gurewitz, Uli (Zalman Uri)
Date of Birth 8/10/1924
Narocz Forest (Poland)
Resistance Group(s) Orlianski-Borba Battalion
Liberated by armed forces, Soviet
Location of liberation Smorgonie
State of Interview Baden-Württemberg
Language(s) of Interview German
Length of Interview 3:30
Interview Code 34600
Kleinkopf, Dorothy
Name of Interviewee Dorothy Kleinkopf (nee Devorah Cheres)

Date of Birth 6/10/1925
Camp(s)
Went into Hiding Yes
Member of Underground, Resistance or Partisan Group(s) Yes
Liberated by armed forces, Soviet

⁷ These video testimonials can be ordered online at <https://sfi.usc.edu>

Location of liberation Vilna (Poland : Voivodship)

Other Experiences displaced persons camps

State of Interview FL

Language(s) of Interview English

Klenicki, Ita (nee Itka Cheres)

Date of Birth 1/9/1927

City of Birth Kurzeniec (Poland)

Camp(s) (u)Liuban (Poland : Concentration Camp)

Hiding or living under false identity (Location) Poland

Type of hiding place forests

Resistance Group(s)

Liberated by armed forces, Soviet

Location of liberation Poland

Fled from Nazi controlled territory No

Forced (death) Marches No

Aid Giver, Liberator, or War Crimes Trials Participant

Other Experiences displaced persons camps

State of Interview FL.

Language(s) of Interview English

Length of Interview 1:30

Interview Code 9717

Kuperberg, Zina

Zelda Ziskind (name at birth)

Sonia Alprowitz (false name)

Date of Birth 10/20/1925

City of Birth Kurzeniec (Poland)

Ghetto(s) Wilejka (Poland : Ghetto)

Member of Underground, Resistance or Partisan Group(s) Yes

Hiding or living under false identity (Location) Vilna (Poland : Voivodship)

Kurzeniec (Poland)

Type of hiding place forests

barns

Resistance Group(s)

Liberated by armed forces, Soviet

Location of liberation Vilna (Poland : Voivodship)

Other Experiences concealment of Jewish identity
displaced persons camps

State of Interview FL

Language(s) of Interview English

Name of Interviewee Esther Lewitan

Esther Lewitan (release name)

Esther (Hebrew name)

Charnas (maiden name)

Kalé)

Date of Birth 1913)

Member of Underground, Resistance or Partisan Group(s) Yes

Hiding or living under false identity (Location) Wilejka (Vilna, Poland : County)

Type of hiding place forests

Resistance Group(s) resistance groups, Soviet

resistance groups, Jewish

Liberated by armed forces, Soviet

Location of liberation Wilejka (Vilna, Poland : Count

Other Experiences displaced persons camps

State of Interview FL

Country of Interview U.S.A.

Language(s) of Interview Yiddish

Length of Interview 1:00

Interview Code 7569

Liberman, Mikhail

Mikhail Abramovich Liberman (son of Abraham Liberman)

Moishe (Hebrew name)

Mikhail (other name)

Date of Birth 1/1/1931

Went into Hiding Yes

Member of Underground, Resistance or Partisan Group(s) Yes

Hiding or living under false identity (Location) Vilna (Poland : Voivodship)

Type of hiding place forests

Liberated by armed forces, Soviet

Location of liberation Vilna (Poland : Voivodship)

Other Experiences orphanages and children's homes
concealment of identity

concealment of Jewish identity
escapes from mass shootings

evasion of roundups

Country of Interview Israel

Language(s) of Interview Russian

Length of Interview 2:00

Interview Code 16661

Shugol, Le'ah

Elizabieta Gurewicz (name at birth)

Date of Birth 1/24/1922

Member of Underground, Resistance or Partisan Group(s) Yes

Hiding or living under false identity (Location) Vilna (Poland : Voivodship)

Liberated by armed forces, Soviet

Location of liberation Vilna (Poland : Voivodship)

Language(s) of Interview Hebrew

Length of Interview 2:30

Interview Code 26596

Tsimerman, Shim'on

Date of Birth 2/2/1923

Member of Underground, Resistance or Partisan Group(s) Yes

Hiding or living under false identity (Location) Vilna (Poland : Voivodship)

Type of hiding place forests

Resistance Group(s) Voroshilov brigade

Liberated by armed forces, Soviet

Location of liberation Vilna

Country of Interview Israel

Language(s) of Interview Russian

Length of Interview 3:00

Interview Code 3728