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VANISHING TRACES
OF JEWISH GALICIA IN
PRESENT-DAY UKRAINE



Omer Bartov

Omer Bartov at Hebrew College



The Way We Were

A Glimpse of Jewish Revere and Chelsea

by Elaine Abrams

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This is a new column looking back on the way we were in Jewish communities in Greater Boston and beyond. Elaine Abrams interviews members of those communities as they recall life in days past. Elaine welcomes suggestions of potential interviewees for this column.

Jean Shultz is 98 years young, sharp as a tack, and more than willing to converse in English, Hebrew, or Yiddish. Jean was born Chena Shifra Korim on August 14, 1910, in Debeik, Lithuania (modern name Debeikiai), a village, as she remembers it, with a population of about 80 persons. She was one of nine children, six boys and three girls, born to Ethel and Moishe Ben-Zion Korim. Her father ran a small variety store, she says with a shrug (as if to say, ‘What else would he do?’) and, “We were all poor,” says Jean. “No jobs, no money, no schools.” And by the late 1920s, Hitler was on the rise, anti-Semitism was increasing, and Jews began to fear for their lives.

Later Jean stresses, “The town was all Jewish when we lived there; after the war there was not a single Jew”. She appears as dismayed now as she was the day she first heard it. “Here there was anti-Semitism, but there it meant death.”

Jean and her siblings, in order of birth, were: Charles, Eva, Shmuel, Sarah, Judith, Jean, Hannah, Ellen, and Elliot. Jean’s oldest brother, Charles, was the first of her family to leave for America. At 17, he was in danger of being drafted. Jean shudders at the possibility of such a horrible fate.

At the age of 13, barefoot and carrying buckets of water from a nearby well, her sister Eva had been spotted by a young man, William Finn. Jean beams as she says, “It was like Romeo and Juliet, so romantic.” Later, pledging undying love to Eva, William left for America. He sent money, which helped support the family and paved the way for Eva’s emigration to join him. The only way she could do



Debeikiai, Lithuania in today's Baltic region

this was to become a student, and so she got a visa naming the school that she was to attend. Upon her arrival at Ellis Island, no such school was found by the authorities, and Eva was about to be denied entrance. But William found a good lawyer, and Eva was admitted. Jean beams with a girlish blush and a twinkle in her eye as she speaks of her sister and brother-in-law and their romance.



On the Boulevard, Revere Beach

Despite the crowding at 70 Shirley Avenue, they managed on this street lined with kosher shops in the middle of a vibrant Jewish neighborhood. Today, all that remains of that once-thriving community is the façade of a synagogue. The former neighborhood of Jewish immigrants is now a lively Cambodian immigrant community.

To my surprise, Jean recalled the Revere Beach of 75 years ago as “a mess of broken bottles and trash.” Perhaps it was a reflection of the times, as Jean described them as “the first depression, the Great Depression,” alluding to our current economic state as the second depression. “We survived because William had a job at the Suffolk Shoe Factory, and he got us all jobs.”

She continued, “The factory was located between Revere and Chelsea. We walked every day, because the streetcar cost five cents and we couldn’t spend that. One morning people got up and the banks were all closed. People started committing suicide. It was very sad. My cousin was a millionaire with a tobacco company (in those days everyone smoked). He lost his money and jumped from the fifth floor,” recalls Jean. “While his wife was at the hospital, I went to visit her and asked where my cousin was. She said he was waiting to die. He had two sons, very smart. They had scholarships at Harvard. One of them had a breakdown and ended up in a mental hospital. When he was released he was killed by a car.”

With the whole family now in America, the four rooms on Shirley Avenue became too small. The family decided to give William and Eva their privacy and moved to Shurtleff Street in Chelsea.

Jean doesn’t remember anything unusual about the Jewish community in Chelsea. After all, everyone

Next to leave were Shmuel and Sarah, who went to Israel. Their father, Moishe Ben-Zion Korim, also saw that it was time to emigrate, and he left for America. Next in line were 19-year-old Jean and 21-year-old Judith. In 1929 they joined William and Eva, who now had a son, Charles, and their father in a four-room apartment (kitchen, living room, two bedrooms) at 70 Shirley Avenue in Revere (an ocean-front city north of Boston). “We slept wherever there was a spot on the floor,” recalls Jean. Soon after, their mother, Ethel, and the remaining two siblings, Ellen and Elliot, joined them.



*Wonderland, Revere Beach
“The Coney Island of the East”*



*Walnut Street Shul, Chelsea
Hagudath Sholom*

they knew was Jewish: the butcher, the baker, and everyone else. She recalls knowing of three synagogues: “one Orthodox, one more Orthodox, and one less Orthodox. Everyone was Orthodox.”

Eventually Jean went to Hebrew Teachers College in Roxbury (later Hebrew College). She remembers no separation between men and women. What she does remember is the laughter she got when she told fellow classmates, mostly from Roxbury, Dorchester, and Brookline, that she lived in Chelsea. “For a long time I thought they were laughing at my accent, my way of saying Chelsea,” Jean laughs, “but they were laughing about the smell in Chelsea. Everyone knew about it.” These smells were due to the Chelsea junk yards and tanneries. Jean continued her studies at

Hebrew College when it moved to Brookline and became a Hebrew teacher at schools in Roxbury, Dorchester, Mattapan, and Brookline.

During this time she met her future husband, Samson Shultz. He was visiting from Israel, to which he returned, but later he came back to Boston and they married. Typical of the times, the wedding was held in a relative’s home. “You needed money for a big wedding and we didn’t have it.” They moved following the “Jewish route,” Roxbury and Dorchester, then Brookline, and eventually had three children. She reminisces, “Franklin Field, Franklin Park. Black people moved in, and, living in poverty, they turned to crime. Jews were the target. So they moved to Brookline.”

Asked if arranged marriages were more the norm at that time, Jean says, “Even if a marriage was arranged, you didn’t know about it. No one spoke about it.”

Jean had much more to say, but it was obvious that so much recollecting, so many memories, were too wearying. I promised to return again soon.

[**Notes:** For those genealogists who think they may have a connection to this family, the names of Jean and her siblings with their original European names where different were Charles (Balel), Eva (Chava), Shmuel, Sarah, Judith (Juhudit), Jean (Chena), Hannah, Ellen (Elka), and Elliot (Eliyahu). And the Finn name was originally Fin.

The history of Revere Beach, along with old photos of Wonderland , is presented at **REVEREBEACH.COM/HIST2.HTM**. A website describing the background and architecture of the synagogues of Chelsea can be found at **WWW.OLGP.NET/CHS/CHURCH/SYNAGOGUE.HTM** *Ed.*]



Elaine Abrams has been a JGSGB member for seven years and is a former Registration Chair. She is researching **ABRAMS** from Estonia, **TUCHMAN** from Canada and Straszow, Poland, **BERKOVITZ/BERKOFISKY** from Minsk and Dvoretz, Belarus and South Africa, and **RUBINOVITZ** and **SHUSTER** from Lithuania. Send suggestions for this column to Elaine at **ABRAMS@JGSGB.ORG**