



Abandoned houses





19. 08. 2000. M. P. Schuyt

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GOETHE IN THE GHETTO



Translated into English by Erick Rudiak

 *collaborative spirit*
2007



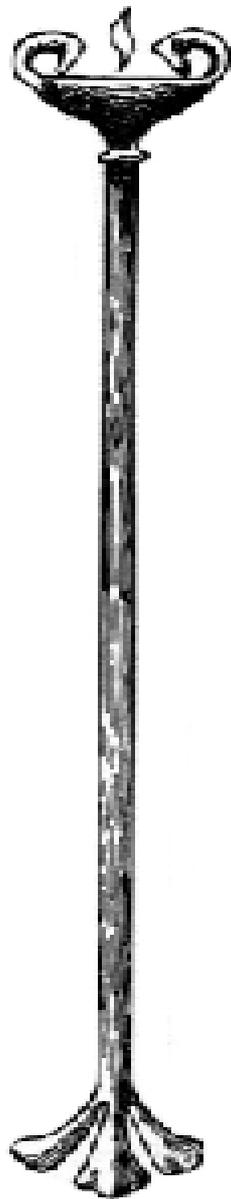
Jewish cemetery in Dzhurin with thousands of graves, including the graves of my great-grandfathers, grandfathers, parents...

... they were destroyed by rains, snows, winds... pogromshchiks, petliurovets, fascists...

The wall – a common grave for arigim – innocent victims.



*In memory
of the Holocaust victims*



TAKHRICHIM

Grandma Ita was nearly blind. Out of her thirteen children, only five were still among the living.

Three daughters lived in Dzhurin; the eldest son, Meilach, in America; and Zeylik, her favorite, was a medical student in Odessa. Grandmother's personality was a difficult one, and she was only able to live only with our mother. Once a year, on money sent from New York, she traveled to Karlsbad, to the mineral springs.

She feared she would die suddenly en route, and carried with her takhrichim - sewn out of thin, white linen. The last time she held them was when she carried a package to Zeylik, who was arrested in '37

He died in the camp, though nobody is sure where or when. Grandma didn't travel anymore. The takhrichim were taken out of her suitcase, and neatly folded in the cabinet.

The war began. In its first days, a bomb dropped at Dzhurin landed on our house. Grandma Ita, as always, was sitting in the dining room at noon, drinking tea with her favorite cherry jam.

Her body was rendered unrecognizable by the shrapnel. They wrapped her in the sheet that aunt Feyga brought, and buried her in the cemetery for arigim: the unjustly murdered.



ZOZULIA

Early one morning, as usual, the peasants let the cows out to graze. Our Zozulya, a black cow with white spots, who had recently borne a calf, left the shed with the others.

Stepan, the shepherd, drove the herd to the ravine, past the Jewish cemetery, cracking the air with his whip.

When the German airplanes appeared and began bombing the village, Stepan laid low in the thistle and covered his head. For amusement, the Fritzes let the machine gun brigade loose on the herding cows. Several fell, convulsing in pain. The rest stampeded home. Zozulya was at the head of the pack. Her heavy udder, overflowing with milk, bounced from side to side. Seeing her shed destroyed and her calf dead, she extended her neck and began wailing, tearing to pieces the sky above.



SIMKHA

When the Germans entered the village, their attention was drawn to Shifra Tkach, wife of Moishe, the tailor, who had departed for the front.

She was on the verge of giving birth. Her gigantic belly was bursting.

A crowd congregated on the square of the market. Fedka Tsaruk, who became a policeman shortly thereafter, walked up to a soldier and, gesturing towards Shifra, asked for a rifle. The Fritz gave him the rifle. Using the muzzle of his rifle, Fedka lifted Shifra's dress, and began to lightly squeeze the trigger. The woman, ashamed and afraid, fell to the cobble-stones of the road. The crowd laughed. Fedka kicked Shifra in the stomach a couple times with the toe of his boot. She covered it with her hands, piercing the square with her screams.

Amused, the crowd allowed the bloodied woman to return home.

A week later, Shifra delivered a son. His nose was matted down all the way to his lip. They named him Simkha, meaning "for joy."



AVRUMIKHA

A German, accompanied by the local policeman, entered the house of old Avrumikha. They took the silverware out of the cabinet, and demanded gold. At first, Avrumikha shook her head, but when they put the bayonet to her throat, she crawled up to the attic, and pulled from beneath the highest beam a bundle of golden coins.

The next day, she collected herself, and went to the Commandant's.

Mangling Ukranian with Yiddish, she reported the theft.

The Commandant praised her for coming, and promised to resolve the matter, suggesting that she could go home with peace of mind.

From the open window, he saw the figure of this foolish woman, who had come to him for justice, receding along the main street. He removed his pistol from its holster, aimed carefully, and fired.

Avrumikha, with good sentiments towards Herr Commandant, dropped to the dust, never realizing the fate that had befallen her.



GOETHE IN THE GHETTO

The only book I possessed in the ghetto was a thick, leather-bound tome in strange, unfamiliar lettering. I traced my finger across the lines and “read” about Baba Yaga, The Wolf and the Goat, The Fox. I considered the man in the tail-coat on the inside cover my grandfather, who I heard had been killed by the Nazis. I was approaching my fifth year.

I learned a lot later on: the book was the first volume of a collection of the works of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, published in 1841 in Frankfurt-on-Main. That was all that remained from the vast library of our mother’s father, Rabbi Kisiel, after a bomb had crushed our house into the ground.



THE TEACHER FROM YASSY

At the beginning of the occupation, twelve people took refuge in the Verkholaz house. The owners themselves inhabited the bedroom, the corners of the living room were taken by four families, and a solitary girl from Bessarabia, Khana, settled on the wooden couch between the windows. She had sick lungs, and her flame was expiring quickly without medicine, without food, without heat. She was delirious from fever.

A lovestruck Latin teacher from Yassy sat on the floor beside her and warmed her hands with his breath. His wife and growing son pretended not to notice.

On an autumn evening, once dark had completely fallen, he put on his long coat, which draped down nearly to his ankles, pulled on his hat, and silently left the house. He was gone for hours. Suddenly, shots rang out from the direction of the pharmacy: one, two, three. The wife and child pressed against the windows, looking out into the darkness. Khana wept quietly, biting her lips.

The teacher crawled up to the door long after midnight. Both his legs had been shot. Before he would allow his wounds to be tended, he emptied his coat pockets onto the blanket which covered Khana, raining down medicine pills.



SHLOIME DI BURD

Shloime was the most gigantic man in the ghetto. Because of his thick, black beard, he was dubbed Di Burd. He enjoyed tossing me high above his head, and as I fell into his big, strong arms, my breath flew into the sky. I hung onto his neck, pressed myself to his beard, and I was happy. Shloime lived with our neighbors, the Mensozhniks.

It had been several days since Shloime had left the house. I found out from my mother that he had fallen sick with typhoid fever. That word hovered above the ghetto like Malkhamuvis, who scared little children. Shloime was taken to the shack behind the synagogue.

I wanted to see Di Burd. I whimpered, cried, and tugged at my mother's skirt, until she finally took me to him.

I carefully carried in my arms a warm clay pot of potatoes, wrapped in a blanket. My bare feet left precise footprints in the soft, spring-drenched path.

His back leaning on the white-washed wall of the synagogue, a gray old man sat on the ground. My mother approached him. It was Di Burd. I clung to my mother as I gaped at his head: his hair and beard were completely covered with white lice. The swarm stirred within.

Mother left the pot next to Shloime and hurried to take me away.

Soon, Shloime died.



KOSHER

Among the Jewish refugees from Romania to arrive in the ghetto was Rabbi Adverner. He settled with his family in Yosl Schneider's half-basement. Practically the next day, he gathered the boys of the village and opened Beth-Vidrash. His favorite student became our genius, Shmilyk. He wore a kipa, tsitses, and forced his mother to prepare kosher dishes. She gave him a bowl and a spoon, stripped the two pots the household owned bare with sand and clay, and Shmilyk stayed strictly kosher.

Of course, for the duration of the occupation, the pot we used for meat never once had occasion to be used.



THE TATTLE-TALE

On the eve of Hanukkah, Rabbi Adwerner pulled from his jewel chest seven silver candleholders, the family heirlooms, and laid them out on the table. He told his children the story of the holiday, and lit the first candle.

On the fifth day, one of the candleholders vanished. Shmilyk had seen Itsyk, the son of the master of the house, slip it under his coat. That night, Shmilyk was tormented by the question: should he inform the Rabbi, or did he already know, since he was all-seeing?

The next day, when everyone gathered at Beth Midrash, the Rabbi made no mention of the disappearance. Shmilyk seized the moment and told him about the theft.

“Shmilyk, your actions have disappointed me. There is nothing worse than a tattle-tale.”

Shmilyk felt ashamed, and wished to be swallowed up by the earth. The warm hand of the Rabbi rested itself upon his head.



LEIBALE THE FORTUNETELLER

Leibale der Trefer lived in the addition next to the synagogue. Rabbi Yoichn was benevolent to him, and often invited him to discuss the Holy Scriptures. Leibale was the village fortuneteller. He predicted events, cured headaches, and treated sciatica .

When Avrum Korchmar's daughter Nessia was carrying a gigantic belly, Leibale warned that he should to take her to doctor Weinstein in Kiev to give birth.

The wealthy butter magnate spat in the fortuneteller's silvery beard, calling him insane, and damned him to hell.

Nessia expired during a frightfully painful labor. People turned out from near and far to attend the funeral. Leibale came as well but Avrum, crazed and unforgiving, ordered him out.

... In September, the Germans entered the village. The peasants welcomed them with icons, bread and salt. Rabbi Yoichn and several respected elderly, grey-bearded Jews, also wanted to convince the Germans of their loyalty. Leibale pleaded with them not to, explaining: "the same fate awaits us all." They ignored him.

Several days later, all the Jews were corraled into the main square of the village market. The only one missing was Leibale. Fedka Tsaruk searched every house, yard, and cellar with his assistant, finally breaking into the synagogue. Leibale, wrapped in white talis, sat calmly beside the Torah and prayed. They grabbed him and brought him to the square. All the others had already been lined up, single-file. The German officer beckoned Leibale to him with his riding crop.

"I've been told that you can predict the future. So, what awaits you?"

Leibale stood silent.

"Their fate may lie in your response."

Leibale calmly spoke: "They will all be shot in the ravine behind the school. All except one."

"You are referring to yourself?"

"To my chagrin, yes."

The officer carefully studied this tall, aged man and stepped back for a moment.

“I will ask you one more question, and the response will weigh only upon your own life. My future wife awaits me in Weimar. I made a promise to her that I would be home by Christmas to marry her. Will our wedding happen then or earlier?”

Leibale closed his eyes and answered: “You will perish on a great river in two years. Your fiancée will marry before even then.”

The officer was dumbstruck. He began to whip the old man across the face, screaming furiously:

“Hang him! Immediately! Right here! Hang him!”

The guards and soldiers tore the talis from Leibale’s shoulders, tied it tightly round his neck, and dragged him to the telegraph pole.

A solitary sob permeated the throng below.

A ladder appeared, and the fragile, breathless body of Leibale hung from the cross-beam.



THE ESCAPE

Kisilyk and Ziamke arrived in the camp together. They slept next to each other on a trestle-bed, covered with rough, prickly straw. There was no one younger than them in the barracks. The majority were Jews from Bucharest: former dentists, musicians, physicians.

For two days, Kisilyk noticed the Romanians whispering, fussing as they argued, looking over their shoulders the whole time. Knowing a little bit of the language, he understood that the subject was escape. He shared the news with Ziamke.

“They’ll get lost in the bog in the forest. And if they get past that, the goyim will surely hand them over to the Germans.”

Unexpectedly, Doctor Natan Nissenbaum approached Kisilyk, and took him aside.

“I have been watching you for a long time: you are a capable and interesting lad. I will be frank with you. Tonight, we are being led out of here. A large ransom has been paid for us. We can take one more person. I would advise you to go with us; you are local, you know the way, and we can get to the ghetto, where Romanian troops are stationed.”

“And what about Ziamke?”

“To my regret, we can only take one.”

“I will not go without him.”

“Think about it. And keep your mouth shut.” And he walked away.

“What did he tell you?” inquired Ziamke.

“He asked how to get to Dzhurin.”

“So they did decide to flee.”

“Yes.”

Neither batted an eyelash as they concentrated on listening.

Around nine o’clock, two Germans carrying automatics walked into the barracks. They called twelve names off a list. The chosen ones lined up at the exit.

Kisilyk and Ziamke huddled close to each other, holding their breath.

They heard the creak of the door, and the stamping of receding footsteps.

“Do you regret not going with them?” asked Ziamke.

Kisilyk did not respond.

“Thank you,” said Ziamke, and shook his hand in the darkness.

About ten minutes had passed when sounds of gunfire pierced the barracks.

Kisilyk and Ziamke wept, their faces buried in the straw



THE RETURN

People from the ghetto were often sent to labor in the German camp near Tulchin. Rarely did anyone return alive. The day of departure became a black one. Weeping lingered over the village: wives could not tear themselves away from their husbands, mothers from their sons. Our Father's number finally came up. A soft man by nature, with a deformed left hand, it was obvious he was headed off to perish. And then, Mother made an incomprehensible decision: she would send, instead of her husband, her favorite, her first-born, her fifteen-year-old Kisilyk. She convinced Father and herself that Kisilyk was lucky, bright, handsome, and could make it back. The car carrying the damned had barely managed to disappear past the bend in the river when, chasing after it, she tripped, fell, and, clutching the roadway, froze.

After Kisilyk was taken away, Mother could not calm down for a second. She went to Gershl Karalnik for advice, to Rabbi Adverner for prayer. She took her engagement ring and brought it to Vasily Zadorozhny. He promised to go to Tulchin and bring back Kisilyk.

Mother grayed before our eyes. She went to The Bend daily to greet her son. The Romanian soldiers she encountered did not detain her or ask her questions.

Once, having taken me into her arms on a bright, sunny day, she went to the river to wash the linens. All the time, she espied the thick bushes on the other shore. From there emerged a voice:

“Mamma! I'm hiding here with Duvid. We ran. Don't come near us, and don't scream. I'll be home come nightfall.”

On the table of the Verkholazov house, where we had been hiding, stood a baked by Tsizy di Sarvern leykekh, and two candles burned in bronze holders. Saturday evening was upon us. Mother, instantly rejuvenated, eyes blazing, cradled Kisilyk's head and cried, cried, cried...



THE HIDEOUT

Afraid that someone would spot Kisilyk, who had just escaped the camps, at home, we decided to hide him, during the daylight hours, in the Ottoman chest upon which lay the dying Khana.

A crueler punishment was unimaginable. When, with the arrival of night, he came out of his “hideout,” he had barely had the strength to stand on his own. He was showered with cold water, given food and drink. But from this he derived no happiness. Within a week, he had declared, “I would rather return to the camp than crawl in there one more time.” Mamma went to Madam Dyachenko. Her son, Volodya, was friends with Kisilyk. They agreed to take him in. Kisilyk moved in with them. Those were the happiest days of his life.



TRAIL IN THE SNOW

Notke der Roiter, the red-haired kid from the top bunk by the door, woke up in the middle of the night with a sharp pain in his stomach. He quietly threw his quilted jacket on and went outside. Snow had fallen overnight – the first snow of the year. It covered the field around the barracks in a smooth, bright-white sheet. It was a long way to the latrine. Notke looked around, pulled off his striped pajamas, and crouched down. Heading back, he saw above him a guard.

“Foo, drek! Your serial number, swine?”

In the darkness, the German could not see his face, and Notke threw out the first six digits that came into his head, and the guard let him go. Notke could not go back to sleep. “I saved myself,” he thought, “but the blame will fall on someone else, and on whom? Maybe it’ll be that gimpy girl from the women’s barracks who smiles at me when we meet? Or maybe someone else? And what will happen to them? Incarceration? Hard labor? The firing squad? Perhaps I’d best confess.” His conscience scorched and tormented him. He never did make a decision.

That morning, the entire camp was lined up in the commons. After roll call, the commandant announced:

“Last night, one of you allowed himself to defile this purest of landscapes. To make it even worse, he wreaked havoc on our administration by claiming a non-existent serial number.”

Notke felt immediately relieved.

“We are positive that he is from the men’s barracks number three. I expect that this time, he will find the courage to step forward.”

“When it rains, it pours,” Notke thought.

“I am counting to three...”

Notke was about to move, but fear shackled his legs and his heart.

“Well, well,” continued the commandant. “In that case, every tenth man from that barracks will be shot.”

Notke was completely paralyzed.

The tenth men were counted off. Notke was not among that group. His whole essence shouted, “They are not guilty, I am not guilty, no one is guilty! I want to live, want to live,” but the words lacked the strength to leave his mouth.

He watched as they were led away, and, passing out, fell face-first into the snow.



THE ACTRESS

An actress from Chernovits found herself in the ghetto. To a Dzhuriner, it was as if she had walked out of the screen at the cinema. An SS officer noticed her during one of his rounds through the ghetto. He fell in love with the Jewish beauty. Accustomed to courtship and a luxurious lifestyle, she became his lover. The officer would drive up to the Chalumishis house in a black "Oppel Admiral," raising dust to the clouds. The actress would come out to him, dressed up and perfumed, and they would ride off into the Karmansky forest. During the winter and fall, on the days of his arrival, households stole away to their relatives, leaving the lovers in solitude.

The actress had often saved her fellow villagers from grave misfortunes.

When the Germans were preparing their retreat, the officer came to Dzhurin for the last time. They could not stand to part. He took her away with him.

The entire village flowed to their windows, silently bidding them farewell.

On the way to Vinnitsa, their vehicle drove over a mine.



FATHER AND SON

Several dozen men and boys from Dzhurin went off to war.
The majority of them perished.

When they came to Feyga to tell her that Duvid had just gotten off a passing transport, and was walking home covered in medals, she ran to greet him, crying, "Duvid! My Duvid is alive!"

Behind her ran two frightened girls.

They met at the pump, and froze: they had not seen each other for four years.

"Where is Aronchik?" inquired the father.

"Our Aronchik is dead, Duvid".

The old soldier's shoulders convulsed, and he cried with his wife and children.



THE ENCOUNTER

In the ghetto, we wore yellow patches with the star of David. Mother sewed them on all of our meager clothing.

Once, my brother Shmilyk ran out into the street in just a shirt, and immediately ran into Fedka, the policeman.

“Hey, kyke! How come you’re out without your badge?” and he drew his rifle. Shmilyk bolted down the street to Grandpa Chaim’s house.

Fedka shot at his back and missed.

After the liberation of the village, the policeman was arrested, brought to trial, and sentenced to ten years in the labor camps. His term had passed, and he returned to Dzhurin.

By this time, Shmilyk had enrolled in the pedagogical institute, and was home on vacation.

The former policeman and the future math teacher met in the street, exchanged “Good day”, as was customary in the village, and parted.



THE TORAH SCROLL

The houses of Aron Rappoport and Ivan Pavlishin stood next to each other. Both of them worked at the sugar factory. Aron was a bookkeeper, Ivan was an accountant in the sugar-beet refuse pits. Each had a daughter and a son, each of those born the same year. Their kids read the same books, went to the same movies, and, when they grew up, went to the same dance halls. Sunya was in love with Marusya, and Vovka with Betya. In the summer of '41, the boys had completed the tenth grade, and were preparing for summer school.

But the war broke out. They enlisted for the front. Because he had severely flat arches, the giant Vovka was rejected. The short, stocky Sunya was assigned to the tank brigade. He was glad, in a way, that his friend would stay behind and look after the girls.

Parting, they cried without shame.

Sunya fought the entire war, until Victory.

He returned home with a heavy burden upon his heart.

He knew of the persecution of the Jews, but a faint hope glimmered that perhaps Vovka managed to save their parents and Betya.

He was not greeted by one familiar face in the village. He headed home. A young engineer and his wife had settled there. They had heard that before them, this was the bookkeeper's house, but he was shot behind the pressing pits along with the other Jews. Noone escaped. About the neighbors, they had heard that the son served as a policeman. At one time, he was hiding his bride, a Jew. But he was betrayed by his fellow policemen, and he himself brought her to the square where they were lining up the damned.

When the Germans retreated, he disappeared.

Sunya got up to leave. They offered to put him up for the night, but he thanked them and departed. Dusk had covered the street. The windows at the Pavlishins' were unlit. His legs led Sunya into the garden. There, by the winding, ancient cherry tree, was a deep cellar with a secret hide-out. When they played Reds and Whites, this was their headquarters. Vovka was a commander, and Sunya, the commissar. The door, as it had always been, was barred closed. He removed the iron rod and opened it.

Nine steps led down. He began his descent.

“Daddy, is that you?” He recognized Vovka’s voice.
Silently, he stepped to the bottom.

“Who’s there?”

“It’s me, Sunya Rappoport. Light the lamp, Vovka.”

A brick whizzed past his ear and hit the stairs.

“Quit fooling around.”

A match chirped as it lit. Vovka removed the glass cover from the lamp and lit the wick.

Before Sunya stood an unkempt man, his eyes surrounded by red.

Smoked sausage hung all around the cellar, and pots and bottles covered the floor. Upon a wooden table lay... an unrolled Torah scroll.

Sunya recognized it. Many times, Grandpa Chaim had taken him to the synagogue on Rosh Hashana, on Peisach, and held it near him as he read and prayed.

“What’s it doing here?” asked the surprised Sunya.

“I’m sewing boots out of her. This Torah is made out of incredibly thin leather.”

Just then, Sunya noticed that on the table, next to the torn up piece of the Fifth Book, lay a boot knife and a thick needle threaded with rough string.

“Sunya, don’t give me away. I tried to save Betya. I kept her in this cellar, nourished her. And then they took her away. I couldn’t do anything. Don’t betray me, Sunya.”

A dull shot rang out in the cellar.

Sunya lay the torn-off shred next to the Torah and began rolling it back up.

The moon hung above the sugar-beet refuse pits.

Sunya stood, pressing the Torah to his coat, and wept.



THE SHOWER

The old man had completely lost his memory. Most of the time, he slept. Upon waking, he immediately asked to eat. He ate everything greedily, leaving no leftovers, afraid that someone might take it away.

Twice a week, only before bathing, he would become agitated, rowdy, almost violent. A strong, young Pole, Elzbeta, who came from Warsaw to Chicago for extra earnings, pulled off his pajamas and led him to the shower, located next to his bedroom.

He struggled wildly, deafening the air with Jewish curses.

He calmed only when Elzbeta turned the faucets and the sounds of flowing water filled the bathroom.

I understood that behind his fright lay a past tragedy.

The next time I fed him, I carefully pulled his pajama sleeve up around his elbow and noticed, on his right hand, his brand – the number of the Auschwitz camp.





After the bombing, the house we inhabited prior to the war was erased from the face of the Earth.

Our neighbors gave us a temporary shelter. And we lived there through three years of occupation. There were 18 people harboring in two tiny rooms.

In such cabins, next to a hardware store, Jews lived in the ghetto...





Here lived my classmate. I was infatuated with her. We were seven at the time.

And in this little “house” lived Liza di Mishugene. I, too, threw a stone in her garden, I ask for forgiveness now.





A former synagogue, built before the October revolution. Under Soviet rule, it was expropriated and housed multiple enterprises. During occupation, the fascists made use of it as they saw fit.

Prior to the war, this was the only active synagogue. It existed until the late fifties. I came here with my Grandpa and Father for Rosh Hashannah, Passover, Hanukkah...
Then the Soviets closed it up and turned it into a warehouse.





This synagogue was built in the 19th century in Shargorod, which was located near Dzhurin. Under Soviet rule, it was turned into a winery and in place of David's star appeared a red star.

In this house, at different times, were a barbershop, bakery, and ice cream buffet. The owners died, the children moved away, and the only thing left was the skeleton of the house.





Here lived a shoemaker. The house served as living quarters for his large family as well as a workshop.

Typical “architecture” of the shtetle.



When the Red Army liberated the ghetto, we moved into the house of our Mother's sister. Here I spent my childhood. From here I stepped into the world. Graduated from college, became a movie director, a stage manager, and wrote books. I then immigrated to hospitable America.



Photographed by the author in 2005





Crypt of a Dzhuriner tsadik.

Graves, graves, graves.





The graves yell.





This is the grave of our rabbi Gershle Karalnik. He was the consciousness of the shtetle. May he rest in peace.

Who's buried here? Who were they? We will never know.





Grave rocks can also be lonely.





The graves above will soon disintegrate like the one below.





Rare samples of graves made during the 18th and 19th centuries.





In the past, there was a fence here, a gate with a lock... later the young shepherds ripped it off...





...so that cows, goats and pigs could graze on the succulent cemetery grass without any barriers.





The old Jewish cemetery in
Dzhurin.





Jews from Romania, Bessarabia, and other European countries, which fascists herded into the Dzhuriner ghetto, found a place for themselves here.





Upon leaving the shtetle, relatives left their signatures on rocks.

The deceased were dressed in tahrihim, laid on a stretcher and topped by a coverlet with an embroidered mogendovid in the center, and carried to the cemetery.

When the last Jew in the shtetle was buried, the stretcher was needlessly left at the grave.





The author came for the keiveruves from Chicago to the grave of his Mother, Rachel baas Kisiil.

Crying for the deceased.



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Locked up doors





The agony of the shtetle.

