

SMUDGE

February 18, 2008

Jacob D. Lindy

Gutn ovnt. Un sholem aleykhem. Good evening, and hello: you think maybe I should introduce myself? People call me Mendele Dalud, the Book Peddler. Well, that is not my real name, of course. It is more like... my nickname. I am the fourth generation collector of Yiddish stories. I work at the Yiddish Book Center in Amherst Massachusetts. You may know that some years ago, we were afraid that a whole literary culture was becoming extinct. Would you believe? my boss Aaron Lansky has saved 190,000 Yiddish books. You should drop by our shtetl some time, and maybe buy a few books while you're there?

Some people call the stories I collect, history. But I am not the kind of historian who groups facts into sequence and offers order to them. For me history is mankind's effort to erase facts. I like to find stories that remain after the erasure, you might say, 'on the edge of the smudge'. I think that by finding and telling these stories, we restore something, something in our souls. We bring a little meaning to our life, because the Almighty knows, our lives have enough facts in them already.

It was about fifteen years ago that I first met Jacob ben Jacob, carrying his Episcopal Academy reunion book with his Brooks Brothers blazer and his Yalie tie You know, the kind of Jew who sings Christmas carols. That was when my headache started.

Every time I say the name Jacob ben Jacob (the Almighty, please do not be offended) I wince. You understand that "ben" in Hebrew means son of, or in English, Jacob Junior. Well, that is the wrong way to name a Jewish child; or at least it is the wrong way in the old country. Every Jewish mother and every Jewish father knows that to name your child after yourself brings bad luck. You should choose, instead, the name of a beloved relative, but he must already be dead.

With a name like Jacob ben Jacob there are two possibilities: First, the father died when the mother was pregnant.Yes? Well no, Jacob told me that is not the case. The other possibility is that the first Jacob is thumbing his nose at tradition. ...Yes? Well, yes, this Jacob told me.

Where was I? ...My headache... I said to myself, Mendele, if you listen to this story of Jacob Junior's your headaches will only grow worse.

So, what did I do, like a fool? I listened to Jacob's story. I even agreed to make a few comments for him tonight. And then, at the last minute,

what does he do? he asks me this impossible question. This is where I need your help...but more of that, later.

Jacob tells his story in four scenes. The first is in Bucharest, Romania. (I told him this scene is much too long and has too many back-flashes, but he said it was his first paper and maybe you will excuse him)

At any rate, if you get lost, just remember he is standing on a balcony in Romania.

Bucharest, Romania, 1991

The day had been long and harrowing, and now, as we gathered for dinner in Professor Romillo's flat, I didn't know where it would end. I needed fresh air; I leaned toward the open second story balcony window.

It was an old world song that wafted up from the quiet street, its strains familiar; inexplicably, tears formed in my eyes. Outside, on the street, young men were singing... of all things, a Yiddish melody.

I was here because Ion Cucliciu, a young Romanian psychiatrist, had asked me to supervise his work with former political prisoners with post traumatic stress. Ion's teacher, Professor Romillo, then invited me to Bucharest for a conference he and the Free Psychiatrists of Romania were sponsoring. Ceauscescu's totalitarian regime had just fallen; the free psychiatrists were openly attacking Ceauscescu's abuse of psychiatry and demanding a new code of ethics. A National Salvation Front was in power, but it was led by Ceauscescu's old cronies; the future for psychiatry and for that matter Romania was not at all a certain one.

As I heard the melody from the street below an early memory returned:

*

*

*

*

GG is humming Elijahu; she knits in the rocking chair; I am trying to look out of the window of my bedroom at the giant oak tree in our back yard. I am six, it is 1944, Philadelphia.

I am not very happy that GG has come to be my roommate. I don't like the cold red soup she offers me at night before we go to bed. It looks weird and smells sour. Her stockings and corsets embarrass me. Worst of all she has taken my table, the one directly under the window sill that overlooks our giant oak tree, and turned it into a vanity. This is the table I climb up on to make my look-out post: where I scout to see if the day will be good for playing war or cowboys and Indians with my friends. You see, I live in Germantown, so in our play the Nazis have invaded the US and are attacking our neighborhood first, and we are protecting it, We know where all the creeks and hiding places are.

Now, instead, GG sits at her new vanity. I have no choice. I watch her. She brushes her silver hair until it glistens. It falls to her waist; she carefully braids it, then gathers it: and, magic, GG has become my beautiful grandma.

Sometimes, she and I sit quietly. I move my finger tips to touch the corner of her eyes; my finger follows the fanned valleys that radiate from them. I touch the milk chocolate spot on her soft skin. I breathe in our connection. Her crinkles smile at me; will I grow up to be old some day, and will my eyes crinkle for my grandchildren?

“GG”, I ask, “is there really a place called Bashravya?”

“Yes” she says.

“Please... tell me about it, again”

“Well, I was a child. We lived in a beautiful white house, with columns, and we had a stable with many horses. My aunt was studying at the University. Then, one time, when I was about your age, it was in the middle of the night, my father came to the room and told me to stay calm. He carried me outside. The house was burning, and the stables. The horses were so frightened; even the near-by trees caught fire.”

I take my grandmother’s hand. Now she is looking far away, frightened like a child my age. I see her sad eyes say, “but why?”

Now, over the years, Grandma’s story became my first research project, an exercise in distinguishing fact from fiction. My first task was to find Basaravia on the globe. Years passed before I could definitively put this to the test. Earnestly I asked my teacher “is there a country called Bashravya?” I carefully spelled the name as GG had sounded it out. My teacher thoroughly searched the 1947 globe “no, Jack, there is no Bashravya here. I confronted GG with these new facts. She shrugged, saying “the borders kept changing; maybe today it is in Russia.”

How could Bashravya just change its borders? I thought. To me borders were like tectonic plates. After all I had now lived ten years in Philadelphia, and always it was between the Schuylkill and the Delaware River, and in Pennsylvania and in the U.S. GG understood I no longer believed her.

“So, we were Russians”, I said.

She grimaced sadly. “Just study hard and do a good job at your new school.”

Years passed, I added other reasons for rejecting Grandma's story about the white house with columns and horses in Bashravya.

Everyone knew that in the "old country Jews were poor. My father's father, for example, was comfortable explaining that he had been a peddler as a teen-ager when he came to America. The story of the white house with columns belonged in the American South, not in the old country. Grandma's handwriting was poor, and her spelling would never pass at my school. How could her aunt have attended the university as she claimed.

But there was another reason the story was impossible. While GG never used the word, nor would I have understood it if she had, her story was about anti-Semitism. Yet, in America, 'everyone knows that anti-Semitism does not exist'.

* * * *

I was back, standing by the open window in Bucharest, I felt the warm spring breeze blow into the soiree in Professor Romilla's flat: the a capella music from the street outside was warm; the aroma of cabbage, pickle hors d'oeuvres and goulash inviting; still, the day had been surreal, and the strangely empty street, save for our serenaders, felt contrived. Professor Romillo, sensing my un-ease now rested his hand on my shoulder. Instead of comfort, I felt out of joint. What was I to make of this morning's happenings? Who does one trust in a country such as this?

This same professor, now my host, was, this very morning moderating a discussion on ethics and psychiatry in Romania. Suddenly, a woman in the audience stood up and spoke: she was irate, forceful, dramatic.

A TV film crew appeared from nowhere; the audience stirred; an embarrassing pause from the podium; heated comments in Romanian, then, as if on cue, the TV cameras left, and, shortly after, the woman exited calmly. The conference resumed as if nothing had happened. A Romanian colleague sitting next to me was translating: “the woman says that professor Romillo, (my host) was a member of a psychiatric review board that put her husband away in a State psychiatric prison for political purposes.

“Who is Professor Romillo to lead a conference on ethical reform in Romania” she shouted. “He is worse than those filthy criminals already charged with abuses of psychiatry.”

“Are her charges true?” I asked.

“Oh no,” my friend said, “she is a TV actress. She has been hired by the right wing news channel to discredit this conference and its leaders. The video tape will be on tonight’s news. It was all show.”

Professor Romillo’s hand tugged at my shoulder; it was time for me to move away from the balcony.

* * * *

Another memory: it is 1960, my final summer vacation and my first opportunity to see Russia for myself.

I am a 22 year-old medical student, intent on experiencing the history of my own times before I vanish into the private world of doctors and patients. I am in Red Square, Moscow.

Igor, long curly hair and a friendly smile, also 22, is my new Russian friend and unexpected host. He teaches me to say “horasho” as we down

shots of vodka. He leads me through the crowd. We pass a juggler, a mime. A giant empty screen dominates Red Square. Omnipresent loudspeakers are playing carnival music. The music suddenly turns martial: a Russian voice interrupts, deliberate, triumphant. On the massive screen, is an American pilot, then the picture of a small plane and photographic equipment. The pilot starts speaking in English. A wave of anti American feelings flows over the crowd and engulfs me. I feel a squeeze on my shoulder from Igor, “we’re going to get you out of here.”

I soon learned the picture on the screen at Red Square was of Gary Powers; the scene was the capture of his U-2 spy plane as he was taking high elevation photographs of the Soviet Union.

“Russia in 1960,” I said to myself, “is a curious place. Some day, when I become a doctor, I will return.”

My reverie stopped. I felt Professor Romillo’s hand move from my shoulder to my elbow. He was now guiding me from the balcony to the dining room. Guests were jostling around a crowded table and I felt pulled towards the strangely familiar Slavic sounds and Turkish spices.

* * * *

Once more a memory returns, this one more recent.

It is 1989, Moscow; indeed, I am now a doctor, a psychiatrist in particular and I have returned to Russia as head of delegation from the International Trauma Society.

I am being led by the elbow into the board room in the Serbsky Institute. I am not in a good mood as Yuri Alexandrovsky ushers me to my seat. My Soviet counterpart is short, broad, white haired, and jocular. Through a two-way mirror we watch athletes enter next door. They begin an elaborate calisthenics routine. Yuri Alexandrovsky calls to order the thirty Soviet and Western psychiatrists. He points proudly to the performers, and lies, “you can see, my friends, that our mental patients are enjoying themselves here; welcome to the New Serbsky All-Union Institute of Borderline Pathology.”

We knew immediately that we were at the center of what had been the Serbsky Forensic Institute, the heart of the mental hospital gulag. During the Cold War Soviets marginalized their dissidents through abuse of psychiatry; psychiatrists seated in this room, in these very cathedral chairs sentenced dissidents to indefinite internment in a psychiatric archipelago on the basis of a non-existent diagnosis, “sluggish schizophrenia.” For this abuse, the World Psychiatric Association expelled the Soviet Union in 1983.

“Dr. Lindy,” my counterpart Yuri Alexandrovsky says, announcing to all at the Serbsky Institute: “we must discontinue our scheduled protocol, and cancel the agenda for tomorrow’s conference on Post Traumatic Stress at the Peace Palace.”

“We must discuss instead the unique opportunity which has just arisen for us to form a joint mental health commission to travel to Iraq and negotiate for the release of hostages being held by Saddam Hussein in Kuwait.”

Yuri’s electric energy is at its best while reversing directions. I catch the eyes of the other Western officers, then say,

“Dr. Alexandrovsky, we have no intention of changing any part of tomorrow’s scheduled presentation.”

It is the next day, the Peace Palace, Moscow.

I am the first speaker and decide to use a dream to establish a climate for the conference. Here is my dream:

I am having coffee at Gorky Park with William Osler, Sigmund Freud and the Russian psychiatrist who first wrote about traumatic stress in the Russo-Japanese war. We are discussing where the future of trauma research will be; will it be America, England, Western Europe; then, we all agree that Russia in light of its enormous suffering in the twentieth century should be the center for this work in the new century.

At this point, Yuri instructs his assistant to give each Soviet delegate the following message: “I must apologize for my good friend Jacob Lindy. He has temporarily lost his mind.”

I later understood that Yuri objected to my dream keynoting his conference on several grounds. First, the future of trauma research in the Soviet Union was up to him, not Sigmund Freud, corrupt apostle of individuality. Yuri and the Soviet Union might permit studies of the Armenian earthquake or even Chernobyl, but they had no intention of studying trauma associated with the Soviet Union’s purges, military disasters, famines, or secret police practices. Yuri wanted publicity from this conference so Soviet psychiatry would re-gain its international credentials, nothing more nothing less.

“Zol dir dreyen farn nopl” (“ you should grow dizzy in the navel.”) That’s what I told Jacob he should tell Yuri Alexandrovsky and his apparachnik

friends. But... here I go jumping in before Jacob is ready for me. First he must tell you what he found in Bucharest, because that will explain why he came looking for me at the Yiddish Book Center.

The soiree at the professor's home was ending; Ion Cucliciu, the young psychiatrist was speaking about politics and psychiatry. With his deep-set determined eyes, his broad forehead, jet black hair and full beard, Ion was the picture of earnestness. He was surprised that American psychiatrists tend to stay out of politics. He asked,

“How can one be a psychiatrist and NOT be political! Without political freedoms, the personality can not develop.”

Ion was running in local Romanian elections now that Ceauscescu had fallen.

The next day I said good-bye to my Mafia-run hotel-room, with its bugged bare light bulb. I walked several blocks to a public garden. My eye moved to a building across the street. There on the wall in newly painted graffiti were two words: I sounded them out: B-A-S-A-R-A-V-I-A FREI. “So that's the way you spell Bashravya” I said out loud. I could hear GG's voice: “You see, Jackie, Basaravia does exist.”

So that's when Jacob ben Jacob found me and told me his GG's story, and how he had his Forrest Gump run-ins with Gary Powers, and Saddam Hussein, and how he finally discovered that Basaravia really exists, but still he did not know anything about the place or his people there.

“Could I teach him?” he asked.

“Certainly,” I said. I pulled out a large map of Eastern Europe. I showed Jacob ben Jacob where Basaravia sits... like a piece of lox in a bagel sandwich... between Romania, and the Ukraine. I showed him Odessa

100 miles away, on the Black Sea, and Istanbul two hundred fifty miles as the crow flies.

During its not-so-good history, Basaravia and its eastern twin, Moldava, the onion in the bagel sandwich, marked where the northeast frontier of the Ottoman empire bumped into the southwest edge of the Russian empire. In the 19th century, most of Basaravia was Czarist, as they had routed the Ottomans. With the Communist revolution and civil war, it became the Soviet republic of Moldava, and now, after the USSR broke apart... (praise be to the Almighty) they became the separate... but still not-so-good... federated state of Moldava. Tensions still tug: the trans-Dneistrans declare independence and the Romanians want Basaravia back.

So how did Jews get to Basaravia? Well, some say we came to the Black Sea in ancient times, first as Roman soldiers, then as traders. In modern times, Sephardic Jewish settlers... they are the ones expelled from Spain and Portugal... came by way of Constantinople as early as the 15th century; but most were Ashkanazi Jews who came first by way of Germany then later down from Poland and Lithuania to set up trade routes. Small shtetles dotted this route, so now Jewish traders and travelers could observe Sabbath with like-minded Yiddish-speaking m'shpuka (which means, it felt like family). We lived by the sides of Romanians, Russians Hungarians and Moldavans. But you might say our network of shtetls in Basaravia was part of a separate Yiddish speaking world, a world connected with the other Jews of Eastern Europe that we called, the Pale.

So who gave us this wonderful name? It was Catherine the Great of Russia. First she and her fellow monarchs sliced up Poland like a pumpkin pie. Then, she decided to confine the Jews, who were already living there hundreds of years, to one swath of land. It dips on an angle... like a mezuzah... from the Baltic to the Black Seas, and she called it the Settlement of the Pale. It was a place between civilizations. I explained how "Pale", here, means land within an enclosure. We Jews were penned, technically slaves of the crown, not having the rights of citizens, but we were at least officially welcome.

I explained that GG told the truth about life in Basaravia. Horses were on her father's property, outside Kishinev, because he operated a livery, central to commerce in the Pale. The White columns ...they came from the influence of Hellenic architecture from the Black Sea ports. The cold red soup? it was borscht from Basaravia's famous sugar beet.,

Was it possible that her family was moderately prosperous, even in the old country? and that her aunt attended university in Odessa? Of course. Was it

possible that the borders around her were constantly changing? Of course. Your GG pronounced Bashravya in the old Turkish manner, unlike the English, who mark it on the map as Bessarabia as if it sits in the dessert.

So what kind of world was it for us in the southwest corner of the Pale? It was a literate world, ... a decent world, ...a communal world... a world that celebrated l'chaim, life.

But, I must tell you, life in this region was precarious for us. There were four decrees of expulsion for the Jews between 1869 and 1891. Pogroms (a Russian word for little persecution) broke out in Basaravia; the story about the fire, that your grandmother told you, occurred in the pogrom of 1882 when Jews were driven off land in the country side. Leaving then was a good idea because the pogroms that followed were even worse, especially the Easter pogrom in Kishiniev of 1903.

As your grandparents left the Pale, they joined a migration of Jews who felt that life in Eastern Europe was no longer viable. Once more in our long history we were on the move, this time to America.

Jacob thought it odd that all four grandparents settled in the American South, a town in Tennessee, Jackson. I explained how they were used to the South: in the new country, Jackson Tennessee would be their Kishiniev. Chicago would be their Vilna; New Orleans on the gulf with Mexico, their Odessa.

But I told Jacob that pain was in their hearts. Memories of the Pale, its uncertainty and persecutions, and the stigmatization of Jews for being different, must end. In the new world they would relinquish Old World dress and dietary laws. They would own land as citizens. Here their children should strive to be business leaders, and respected professionals. There, they fled military service because it meant twenty-five years away from home, and likely forced conversion; here they would proudly send their sons to fight for their country. There they lived in fear; here, anti-Semitism must be banned from even the minds of the next generation.

Sadly, they decided not to pass on the Yiddish stories of the shtetls and the Pale, the stories from Mendele, the Book Peddler; memories from the Pale should simply grow dim and die.

I found myself moved by Mendele and thanked him; I told him I would stay in touch. But many months passed before I would contact him again.

My attention was riveted to the momentous changes that were afoot in Eastern Europe in the early 1990's. And, as a trauma therapist, there was work to do. The evening in Bucharest, was one among many contacts I was making with young East European therapists, like Ion Cucliciu. They sought Western mentors because they were disillusioned with the compromises their teachers had made. They were active members of reform movements within their countries yet were often children of Communist officials. Their clinical skills came not from their medical texts, but from an immersion in the underground literature. Rejecting Marxism-Leninism, they found in Freud a banned and fresh voice validating a unique internal world for each person. They had powerful stories to tell about the trauma of the Soviet era, and I wanted to help them find their voice.

Two, in addition to Ion Cucliciu play a direct role in this story. One was Heike Bernhardt in East Berlin, a pediatrician and psychiatrist: youthful, attractive, buoyant yet sensitive to many forms of political cruelty. At her old hospital, she uncovered charts recording Hitler's euthenasia program for mentally retarded children. One of her patients was the sole survivor of a condemned children's mental retardation ward. Heike later worked with children who knew their prominent Communist Party parents had been informers for the Stasi.

Another was Eva Katona in Budapest, a psychiatrist, whose voice rang with uncompromising integrity and authority. But when her research took her to interview Hungarian Jews who survived the Holocaust, Eva suddenly became speechless.

As we worked together, we discovered that trauma similar to that of their patients had also occurred in their own homes. Members of the therapists' own families were caught in the same web of the Soviet informer

system, and understandably their own traumatic experiences complicated the treatment of their patients.

Ion, in his chapter about Romanian political prisoners struggled mightily with the translation of a pivotal word of silent protest, was it “should” or “would”? Only after he processed his reactions to his uncle’s imprisonment and release from political prison, and re-appraised how he himself had born up under secret police interrogation, was Ion able to find the right word, “must”.

Heike, before she completed her chapter about children whose parents were Stasi (secret police) informers, had to come to grips with how the very professors she admired in her hospital, had informed on her to the secret police.

And Eva, I will tell you about her shortly.

Well, from the little I heard, I thought that Jacob’s new project with his Ion’s and Yuri’s and Heike’s was only about what happened to gentiles during those bad Hitler, Stalin, and post Stalin years. I was, how do you say it, out of his loop. As it happened I was in Cincinnati on business for the Yiddish Book Center the same week his friends were visiting. To my surprise, he invited me to dinner at his home.

Well, what can I say? ...It was better than the four-sided chili I usually get.

But, I knew there was going to be trouble. And there was: I got into a big fight with Ion, the Romanian. Ion was a monarchist and had a blind spot for the way Antonescuc treated the Jews. Ion refused to believe the particulars of the Romanian genocide, the slaughter of men in cattle houses, the death march of women and children across the Dneistra River. I am usually very mild-mannered so it was uncomfortable when we started shouting at each other. He accused me of spreading Western propaganda. I explained, and I know he didn’t want to hear it, that I knew these erased stories, these atrocities, well, because, growing up in the Romanian province of Bukovina, I was one of the small children who lost his parents in this way, and I myself barely survived the march across Basaravia to the

trans-Dneistra. Ion was furious; disbelieving; disoriented. Such a commotion; but so also is the smudge of history to which I bear witness. Each of us has his story to tell. I was afraid I chose the wrong time to tell mine, and had ruined Jacob's party.

I will be quiet and let Jacob finish his story. He has three more scenes (East Berlin, London and Cincinnati). Fortunately, they are brief, and no more back-flashes, please.

*

*

*

*

1995, the former East Berlin:

Heike Bernhardt was hosting the East European therapists as we were completing our book. From the window in her flat, Heike showed me where, in her square, there will soon be a new sculpture: life-size bronze figures representing a Jewish family at dinner with an overturned table, the moment of being startled by the Gestapo and then deported from this very spot.

Eva took me aside explaining that this was her first trip ever to Germany. She found herself too uncomfortable in Heike's home to stay and would leave the next day.

Later that same evening, Heike asked me, "Jack, is it all right with you that I live here with my family in this flat, because, as you know, it was once, rightfully the home of a Jewish family?" (I thought how German her name sounded, "Bernhardt"; I thought, how direct and refreshing her questions and ideals were. Was she saying that because this living space had been desecrated by her fathers, did she bare responsibility for their crimes? I thought how hopeful she was; I thought how her family breathed new life into these walls) I said, "I can not answer for those who are not here, Heike,

but for me, an American Jew, it gives me hope that it is you and your family with your ideals who live in these walls.”

London, England 2000

The work with the East Europeans was complete. On the way home I stopped in London at my daughter’s home. Serendipitously, Eva Katona, the Hungarian therapist in our project, had just moved two blocks away and would join us for tea. Eva, first to arrive, told us quietly that she had read her chapter to her mother. As a result, they talked, for the first time, about their family secret, that her mother was a hidden Jew. Eva’s mother had survived the Holocaust because she married a pro-Nazi husband, ablating her own Jewish identity and nearly Eva’s in the process.

The occasion for tea was a meeting with my distant cousin, Olga, a descendant of GG’s husband, Louis, and a native of Moscow. Olga, was a pianist in her mid-thirties, had long black hair pulled back in a severe manner, and carried a long letter from her uncle about our family.

The letter was about GG’s husband, Louis, my grandfather, who left Russia after his father, Phillip was murdered. As a prominent merchant and Yiddish publisher, his writing protested the reactionary anti-Semitic edicts of Czar Nicholas. In response, police burned all his goods. And Philip was hung in the square of the provincial capital, an example to Jews who protested against the new measures. His male children, of conscription age, like Louis, left for America.

But, Olga’s letter said, Louis left three cousins behind: the first, Max, was killed in the failed 1905 revolution against the Czar; the second, Aaron,

was repressed in the early years of the Communist Revolution. Aaron's children had to adapt to the new order while being instructed to erase memories of their father; the third Moise, was arrested in the Stalin purges, sent to a labor camp and died there. Fortunately, Aaron returned from prison; his and most of his sister Sonja's families survived. Although some of Sonja's family, living in Smolensk at the time the Nazis advanced eastward, were rounded up and killed because they were Jews.

I learned how my family had been victims of the same revolutionary despotism, the same traumas of war and the same totalitarian informer state as the families of the East European therapists, with whom I worked so passionately.

I pictured Mendele's map and thought, 'how close the homes of these therapists were to homes of my family, and to that mezuzah of land Mendele called the Pale.'

And the holocaust touched us all, although I know Mendele would add, "just not quite in the same way."

But what of GG's family in Basaravia: when she was a child, at the time of the burning of her home, estimates of between three and five hundred thousand Jews lived in Basaravia; their major city Kishiniev was 45% Jewish. By the time she died in 1955, only 227 Jews remained. We are unable to find any of our relatives among them.

Cincinnati, Ohio 2005

Home at last! From the front porch swing I look out at our large oak tree. Beyond it, joggers noisily slap the sidewalk with their sneakers. Closer, my grandchildren are playing happily in its shade. Neighbors tell us this tree

is one in a line of trees called Lincoln oaks, planted at his death by neighbors so future generations will remember.

This soil has been good to us; and the roots of our tree go deep.

To tell you the truth ...I was surprised when Jacob showed me the end of his story.

“Very interesting...” I said. “So your mixed up travels, they finally got you back where you started, mazel tov. Most of grandpa Louis’ family survived on the eastern edge of the smudge; but your GG’s family, the Almighty bless their memories, they perished in its midst.

But now, gentlemen, I turn to you. Now comes the hard part, the part where my headache comes back...for now I must answer Jacob’s question.

He insists, “Mendele, is this a Yiddish story?”

I am thinking to myself, ‘well, in his story there is irony, a little humor, and some sadness;’

I like that. But, in the end, Jacob lives with his happy oak tree that has all the answers. And I live with a sad oak tree that only poses questions.

I knew you would help me. I have been watching you as you listened to Jacob’s story, and you know what?

(thanks be to the Almighty, my headache is already better.) Looking at you, I said to myself, Mendele, what if Jacob is just telling us... an American story... with, maybe, ... a little Yiddish twist?

Annotated Bibliography for Smudge

Needless to say, my Yiddish vocabulary is very small. Reading the translated Yiddish stories by Abromovitz (pen-name, Mendele) and Sholom Aleychim catapulted me into this project. I found these authors endearing, fascinating, funny, and insightful; I particularly enjoyed stories about the travels of Benjamin and the two beggars. My character, Mendele Dalud, in this paper reflects the way in which Abromovitz uses Mendele as both narrator and action figure weaving his own observations idiosyncrasies, and world view with the events and other characters in the story.

I found the National Yiddish Book Center website a wonderful resource for listening to Yiddish stories and capturing Yiddish inflection which I tried to include in the figure of Mendele Dalud.

I started my search for the narratives of other American Jewish families with roots in Bessarabia on the Internet and found an interesting narrative of the Turginev family. Sam Gringus recommended the most thorough and earthy sociological-anthropological description of life in the shtetls of the Pale, Life is with People by Zborowski and Herzog, 1952) with an introduction by Margaret Meade. Born to Kvetch by Michael Wex (St. Martin's Press, 2005) added some color to Mendele's expressions.

Edward Judge's Easter in Kishiniev (1992, NYU Press) gives the background, the detailed trauma, and the aftermath of the Kishiniev pogrom of 1903, with background about the pogrom of 1882. Several more general books on East European Jews and the Pale were also helpful: The Golden Tradition (Dawidowitz, 1996, Syracuse Press), the Jews of Eastern Europe (1772-1881) (Bartal, Univ Pennsylvania, 2002), and the delightful personal memoir of Hinde Berner, On long winter nights (Harvard Press, 2005).

My wife and I got as close to Kishiniev as Odessa in 2006, but learned that political friction in the Trans Dneistra district made travel between the two cities almost impossible. We visited the restored synagogue in Odessa prior to Rosh Hashonah and spoke with current Jews living there about their situation.

Oddly, none of my siblings or cousins remembers our grandmother telling the stories from Basaravia. It must have occurred to her to share them later in her life, as I was by far the youngest of her grandchildren. I have no idea where the name GG came from; apparently I discovered it on my own, as no one else called her that.

Martin Shapiro, a classmate of my brother Alan's at the Naval Academy, class of 1946, was assigned as military attachee to the Moscow embassy. In a section of the paper that I omitted (for time reasons) he sat next to me on the flight from Leningrad to Moscow, and warned me to be wary while I was there. My sister-in-law Joy Lindy pointed out that he recently retired as the first Jewish admiral to direct US naval intelligence.

On many levels the Society for the Study of Traumatic Stress's venture to Moscow in 1989, that I was fortunate to lead, was really quite successful despite the fiascos described in this paper. As a result of the trip collaboration between Soviet and Western mental health professionals developed in the areas of studying the aftereffects of the Armenian earthquake and the nuclear accident at Chernobyl. Our own research group played a role here in studying the psychological impact of being informed that one has been exposed to excessive nuclear radiation. This in turn related to our later work at Fernald, but that is another story.

The period of psychiatric abuse in the Soviet Union is well documented in Miller's Theory and Practice of Psychiatry in the USSR, in the American Journal of Psychiatry,

volume 48, 1985. His book (1998) Freud and the Bosheviks, Yale University Press does a nice job tracing the complex embracing and then excoriating of Freud's ideas by Marxist-Leninist theorists. Freud's works were unavailable to professionals and non-professionals throughout the USSR and its satellites until after our visit. A group called the Geneva Initiative exposed psychiatric abuses in Soviet satellite countries and was helpful to us in the East European project.

Appreciating the enormity of losses in Russia in the 20th century as a result of politics and war is best recounted in Catherine Merridale's Night of Stone Granton Books, London. Henry Krystal introduced us at a symposium we gave at Yale while both our projects were still in process.

Understanding the world-view of the East European therapists and their patients was impossible without immersing myself in the Soviet era underground literature. They recommended and I read works by Christa Wolf, Václav Havel, Alexandre Solzhenitsyn, Czesław Miłosz, Milan Kundera, and Manea and others.

The East European project was one in which I received considerable support and wisdom from Robert Lifton who was my co-author. Our final product was published in 2001 under the title, Invisible Walls: East European therapists and their patients, Rutledge Press.

I learned of the life histories of my family who remained in Russia from my cousin, Elsa Kisber as well as from Olga and her uncle with further details about the deaths in Smolensk several weeks ago from my niece in Israel, Kim Lindy.