



Tenth Meeting – Abram-Abe Besser

I came to the meeting with Abe Besser together with Chaim Dekel, the pilot whom I mentioned in the Seventh Meeting which I held with Josef and Chana Kamil.

Chaim rang me one evening and introduced himself as “a second generation of Holocaust survivors. My family members are from the town of Krzepice.” He also told me that he had made an effort to contact survivors and their families, in an attempt to reconstruct what had happened to the majority of his relatives who had perished. From conversations with the *landsleit*, he learnt that I, too, held meetings with Holocaust survivors, to learn about the fate of my family members and the fate of the [other Krzepice] Jews - none of whom were left in the town, to our sorrow.

The meeting with Chaim Dekel took place at my home. I was very impressed with his thorough work. Chaim was more successful than anyone else in charting his family’s lineage.

Chaim assisted, extensively, in the setting up of a Facebook page called "קהילת קשפיץ" [The *Kehilla* of Krzepice], thus succeeding in attracting many second-generation Holocaust survivors and encouraging them to participate in the "Second Generation" forum, and to pass on information about the town and the survivors, to share visitors' stories, to invite to memorial events and more. His initiative has received quite a decent response.

Towards June 2011, Chaim rang me and invited me to a meeting with Abe Besser, a Krzepice native, about eighty-six years old. "Abe can provide much information about the town and its inhabitants", he promised.

I did not believe that Abe would be able to give me details about my father Majer, due to the considerable age gap between them. Nevertheless, I went to a meeting that took place in the lobby of the Sheraton Hotel in Tel-Aviv. It soon became clear, as I have already noted in the chapter "The Jewish Community in Krzepice", that Abe is very lucid, and has an excellent memory.

With me, I brought the photo album and the many documents I had compiled, as well as the summaries of the conversations I had held with Krzepice *landsleit* during 2011.

He looked at the photo of my father and, without hesitation, called his name out - "**Mahyer** Chaskewicz", with a Yiddish accent. He remembered him well as a big and corpulent man, very impressive in his appearance. "This is the barber I had as a child, to get a haircut", Abe noted and added, "He was a neat and clean man, who took care of his clothes. The barbershop looked the same. Our families lived on *ul. Sienkiewicza*. I saw your father every day, on his way home. I knew his wife and sons".

The conversation was fascinating. Abe knew many details about the synagogue, the picture of whose ruins I presented to him. He was able to inform me that the building was not in Krzepice at all. "This is not the Krzepice synagogue. The synagogue in Krzepice was destroyed. The remains of the building in the photo are the remains of the synagogue in Kuźniczka, near Krzepice. A river divided the two

localities. From this, it may be deduced that the cemetery that served the residents of Krzepice is also in Kuźniczka."

Who can, today, verify what has been said? We have heard two [different] versions, which cannot be fully ascertained.

While we were sitting and talking, he turned to me and said, "Your grandfather was an impressive and very popular person. He had a nickname that everyone added to his name - 'Goyischer', because of his double chin." I was reminded of Mrs Pe'eri, the first to mention my grandfather's nickname - Abe was the second. The others I spoke to also described my grandfather's impressive appearance and noted the affectionate epithet given to him due to his double chin.

I glanced at Abe's palm and was amazed. On his finger, he wore a ring, identical to the ring I had inherited from my father. It is a ring made of gold, set with a black stone and engraved with two letters gold: "MH". These are the initials of my father's name - Majer Chaskewicz. A Polish jeweller, living in Munich after the War, was the one who designed the ring. When I noticed the ring that Abe was wearing, I asked him where it came from. It turned out that both he and my father had purchased the exact same rings in Munich.



The ring

Abe told me that, following the War, he had lived (like my father) in a private house in a town near Munich and not in the DP camps, where Holocaust survivors were concentrated prior to their immigration to Israel.

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The meetings ended, the talks ended. They were few and it was my own fault. Had I been indifferent to the subject over the years? Had I not understood that, as time went by, the number of survivors with the ability to tell me about my family - the majority of whom had become extinct - and to convey information, would decrease? Had I not understood that my mother's silence could only be overcome through conversations with friends and distant relatives while they were still alive? Most of those who could tell me, surrounded me for many years. They attended the family celebrations and social gatherings. They visited our home and we visited theirs. But we, the second generation of the Holocaust, did not then understand that the opportunity to speak with them was running out, and this we lament.

Nevertheless, with the meagre means I had at my disposal, I have managed to open a window into my parents' past and to know a little more about my relatives, their lives in the towns, the struggle to survive and the pain and loss. I also learned about the hope that accompanied them and the intense need to start a new life – to build warm families.

From the bits of information I was able to gather, I uncover here just the very tip of a story which spans several generations and I present it here in [chronological] sequence – all for the sake of my family and the descendants of the townspeople of Krzepice and Lututów, so that they should know a little about the past and the suffering which the survivors wished to conceal.

