



My Father Majer Chaskelewicz

My father was born in 1906, in Poland, in the town of Krzepice, half of whose population was Jewish. His father was named Mojsze Chaskelewicz. I was unable to discover the name of his mother (my grandmother). No one could tell me anything about her.

My father had a sister, whose name is also unknown. She moved to Wieluń, probably following her husband. She sometimes came to visit her family. I found out about her existence from conversations with my father's friends. She is known to have perished in the Holocaust. I know nothing about her family.

Until the War, my father lived a peaceful and calm life, in a supportive and embracing environment. Like many teenagers, my father would go out, along with the boys and girls who were his friends, to the edge of the forest, to pick juicy and delicious berries. They packed the fruit in paper cones and sold them to passers-by. Others would bring the fruit to their homes, for dessert after supper.

Sometimes my father and his friends went out of Krzepice to meet with their friends, who had moved to the city of Częstochowa or to adjacent towns. They would meet on market days, where the farmers brought their produce and merchants and factory owners sold their wares. It was also an opportunity for social gatherings and for meeting potential spouses.



My father (standing [sic kneeling] 2nd from the right) and his friends, the youth of Krzepice

Although there were occasional antisemitic outbursts, their lives were peaceful and safe. The Jews were accepted in Polish society because of their contribution to the life of the economy, industry and commerce.

Who else can tell [me more] about my father's [early] adulthood? The pictures my father took with him, when he fled to Russia, tell of a group of young people, always meticulously dressed in light grey suits. They do not belong to the religious currents. [They are] secular

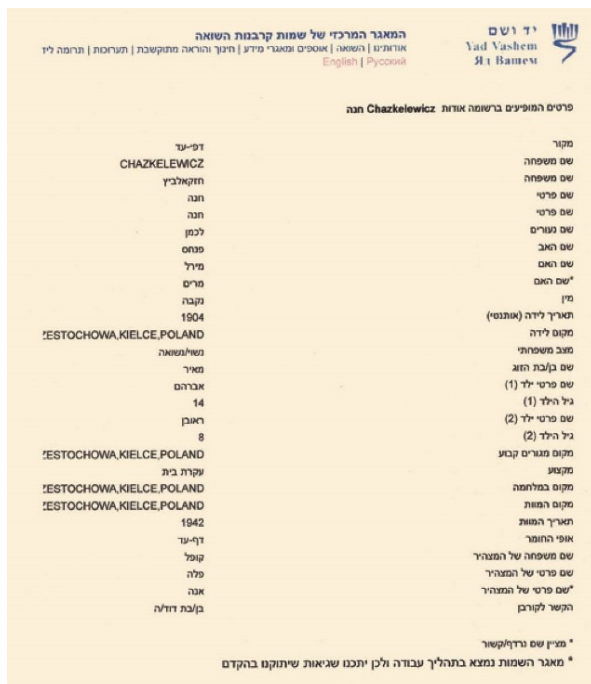
youth who have integrated well into communal life. And my father, a handsome man, popular and admired, always aroused joy around him.

He chose for himself the profession of hairdressing - a ladies' coiffeur, but not exclusively. His salon was in the town's centre, on ul. Sienkiewicza. Many visited it, young and old alike, and the ladies of the town too, of course. He was a clean and tidy man, who was fastidious about the cleanliness of the salon and also about his personal hygiene and impressive appearance. On his way home, at the end of the day, many watched him through the windows of their homes.

At one point, he decided to get married. [He was] a young man asking for the hand of Chana Lachman. The Lachman family loved him very much and her father, Pinchas Lachman, the owner of the bakery, who was a wealthy man, wanted him as a groom. He assigned the young couple a spot in his courtyard, where he built them a small house.

When he was about twenty-two, he and his wife embraced their firstborn son, Abram. Six years later, they had a second son named Ruben.

The Krzepice *landsleit*, with whom I spoke, knew about one son who had been born to my father Majer and his wife Chana. However, after going through a large number of "testimonial pages" kept at Yad Vashem, I found one testimony commemorating Chana Lachman, in which it is explicitly mentioned that she had TWO sons - Abram, the elder, and Ruben, who was six years his junior.



Details which appear in the record regarding Chana Chazkelewicz

Source	Pages of Testimony
Surname	Chazkelewicz
Given Name	Chana
Maiden Name	Lachman
Father's Name	Pinchas
Mother's Name	Mirl
*Mother's Name	Miriam
Gender	Female
Date of Birth (authentic)	1904
Place of Birth	Czeszochowa, Kielce, Poland
Marital Status	Married
Name of Spouse	Majer
Given Name of Child (1)	Abram
Age of Child (1)	14
Given Name of Child (2)	Ruben
Age of Child (2)	8
Permanent Place of Residence	Krzepice, Czeszochowa, Kielce, Poland
Occupation	Housewife
Place during the War	Krzepice, Czeszochowa, Kielce, Poland
Place of Death	Krzepice, Czeszochowa, Kielce, Poland
Date of Death	1942
Status according to Source	Murdered
Submitter's Last Name	Kopel
Submitter's First Name	Fela
Relationship to Victim	Cousin

[Original page from the Yad Vashem Central Database of Shoah Victims' Names]

*Denotes equivalent/connected name

*The database of names is in the process of being worked on, and it may therefore contain errors that will soon be corrected

One of the women from Krzepice told me that my father had been drafted into the Polish army. As mentioned, I found a picture of him in a Polish military uniform, but when was he drafted and for what purpose? Only my father could tell me this and explain the meaning of his immaculate uniform and strange hat. Was he recruited to join the cavalry battalions or to serve in the Bicycle Regiment, or did he possibly belong to the group of service providers - the professionals - and did they perhaps ask him to be the barber of the base, of the battalion, with which he moved from location to location?

These questions remain unanswered. My father's heart stopped beating, as stated, in 1952 - when I was only six years old.

I learned, from history books, that the need to recruit Polish citizens into the army began in 1938, and increased towards August 1939. The Germans began to stir up the region and to ignite it - especially when they demanded the annexation of the Polish-controlled city of Danzig [Gdańsk],

which had special international status. The German ambition was clear and Poland was seeking to thwart it.

Many among the Jewish population responded to Government's call and enlisted in the army. It is likely that my father was among them.

The Polish Army failed to defend its country, which fell to the German occupier within a week. At the same time, its soldiers continued to fight on all fronts. Polish soldiers and pilots took part in the campaign to liberate Europe and North Africa. Many of them fell into German and Russian captivity - some were murdered or died of other causes.

My father, as mentioned, joined the Polish Army shortly before the War broke out. Did they sense that war was imminent? I think not, because the Germans entered the town unexpectedly - on the first day of the War. Had this event led to the decision to flee to the territory of the Soviet Union, or had this decision been made even earlier? This, too, I have failed to ascertain.

My father was not the only one to flee. His brothers-in-law - his wife's brothers - joined him and they all decided to set out together, to reach the Soviet Union. Once the decision had been made, my father promised his family that, when he arrived in a safe haven, he would make sure to bring them to him.

My father's escape provoked criticism. At least one friend, Mr Sandler, who had worked with him at the barbershop, hinted that my father's flight had not been received well. When he talked to me about it, he shook his head in a sort of condemnatory gesture. His reaction pained me exceedingly.

I eventually spoke with Fela Kopel (*née* Lachman), Chana's cousin (her words are presented in the Fifth Meeting). With her, I brought up the issue that was troubling me so greatly. The information I heard from Fela was different. "He and his brothers-in-law fled as one, with the aim and with the promise, to later bring their families to join them. They believed in this", Fela stressed. "We had no criticism of this act."

In order to implement this decision, my father was forced to defect from the Polish Army and remove his uniform. As a Polish soldier, he was forbidden to enter the territories of the Russian occupation. From there, the road to captivity was very short. Imprisonment in POW camps is one of the hardest things - the chance of survival was nil.

The journey to Russia began. It appears that they arrived, along with masses of Jews who had fled from the Germans, in the city of Białystok, which had been occupied by the Russians. Not everyone remained in Białystok. Many dispersed and moved to other areas.

The authorities conducted a referendum among the refugees from Poland. They were presented with [just two] options: to receive Soviet citizenship or to return to Poland. The fact that my father was a Polish soldier, who had deserted, was obviously unmentionable.

My father and his brothers-in-law said, for some reason, that they wished to stay in Russia, not imagining that their answer would lead them to one of the hardest places in the heart of Russia - to the mines in the Ural Mountains.

They were loaded onto freight trains, not knowing what to expect. The number of trains was great. A multitude of people, without minimal human conditions, travelled on these trains for long days and months, not knowing where the train would stop and what was to be the next destination. This is

how my father and his brothers-in-law travelled. Their journey took several months. Occasionally, the train stopped at some God-forsaken station, for an unknown period of time. The stop sometimes lasted a few hours, sometimes a day, sometimes a week and even longer. No one had any clue as to when the train would continue its journey.

Suddenly, without warning, the train would set off. Whoever was on board, continued. Anyone who was outside at the time, to drink something hot or to go to the toilet, for example, was forced to find another train on their own.

My father and his relatives realised that, if they wished to survive in the inhuman conditions, they needed to keep together. So they decided to remain as a group. They wandered all over Russia, passing through towns and passing through desolate villages, which had formerly been inhabited by Germans, who had been exiled by the Russians to Siberia. They arrived in isolated *kolkhozes*¹, constantly accompanied by fear that the secret police, all around them, would apprehend them and that they would be imprisoned.

And they were, indeed, captured during their escape. [But] before being prosecuted, they were told that people like them were very much in need. It was decided to transfer them to the Ural Mountains. The exact place, we shall never know.

Under the supervision of the local authorities, they were employed in extremely arduous labour, from the early hours of the morning to dusk. The conditions were unbearably tough. As they did not possess the required professions for soldiers and local civilians - such as tailors or shoemakers - they were sent to work, in the freezing cold, as lumberjacks or miners in the mines. It is possible that my father, who was a barber by trade, was taken to work as such - relatively easy and convenient work. This, however, is just a hypothesis, which I cannot confirm.

Of the entire group of fugitives to Russia - six in number - only my father survived. His friends and brothers-in-law died whilst in the Ural Mountains. My father was the only one to survive.

Following the liberation of Poland, Polish citizens were given the opportunity to leave Russia and so, following impossible routes, my father returned to his hometown, whereupon he discovered that the members of his family were no longer alive.

In 1942, Chana and the two boys had been taken to their deaths in the extermination camps. Abram was fourteen at the time he was murdered and Ruben - just eight.

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I, as one who was born after the War to a new family which my father had started, remember him as a wonderful family man, a good husband and an exemplary father. He loved his family and invested all that was necessary to fill their needs and even beyond. He was perhaps overly strict, but he did everything within his power to keep his family content.

Besides this, my father was a sociable man, always surrounded by friends - some of whom had come to Israel together with him - and he would go out with them in the evenings to spend time and have fun, despite his great fatigue after a tiring day of work.

¹ [TN: A "kolkhoz" was a collective farm in the Soviet Union.]



*The survivors from Krzepice.
My father sits first from the right; Granek is in the second row, second from the right,
and to his left are fellows Zoltak and Monic*