

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

(This manuscript is untitled and undated)

Written by Velfke Vaynshteyn (Wolf Weinstein)

After 1990

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I, Wolf Weinstein (not quite legible), a son of Abraham and Feyge Rokhl (not quite legible, perhaps Rivl)¹ was born in Michaleshik in 1918, on October 16, grandson of Chaim *der Shmid* (blacksmith) and Basya from Gubersky family, and [also the grandson of] Hirshe *der Shuster* (shoemaker/cobbler) [Weiner/Veiner] and grandmother Nechama.² I don't know in what year my parents have moved to Swieciany,³ but I remember that I studied in *Talmud-Torah*⁴ and my teacher was a person named Abe Leyzer. After that I have studied in *Yidishn folks-shul* (a Jewish secular public school). In 1928 there was a great crisis in Poland,⁵ and my father has decided to go to Argentina. And he sent us, the mother and five children, to Michaleshik and we lived in a rented flat at Perele Yavitch (a sister of Fayvl Yavitch),⁶ that have married Fayvl Gershater (Hirshe Itsele's son). When we lived in Michalishek my mother went to work at the bakery, kneading dough. And I had to help because the family on the mother's side were all poor, and on the father's side they were also not rich but *der yikhes hot nit gepast un zey hobn es gedaygt di gantse makhn* (were very conscous and proud of their social standing within the community).

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I was 10 years old boy and I used to earn 4 *zlotys* a week as a helper for the Jews that used to go to the villages and trade all kinds of goods (as peddlers). My job included responsibilities like to go out around and announce that we have arrived to the village, be on alert so that no one would steal anything, give fodder to the horses, and similar things. In those times the father used to send very little money. When I was 14 years old, I became self-reliant. I have bought a horse and a wagon and got the goods. I with my brother Yankele, 3 years younger than me, started by ourselves to travel around to the villages.

A year after my father had returned from Argentina, but we with my brother did not know about it as we were away from home on work for 2 weeks and it was quite far away. And on the road

¹ In the records discovered, Feyge's middle name is given as Riwa, Rivl, Riva, all derivatives of Rivka or Rebecca.

² According to the 1956 testimony of Fruma Goldhecht (a maternal cousin of Velfke Vaynshteyn) given to Yad Vashem, Nekhama was the daughter of Yitzhak and Raikel (surname not given).

³ Swieciany, 23 miles N of Micháleshik

⁴ A Talmud Torah was a publically-funded elementary school for Jewish boys of modest means modeled after the traditional *cheder* which was private and charged tuition.

⁵ It is unclear what the 1928 crisis in Poland referred to here was. In the Coup of 1926, led by Jozef Klemens Pilsudski the democratically elected government of the Second Republic of Poland was overthrown; and in 1928 the Non-Partisan Bloc for Cooperation with the Government (*Bezpartyjny Blok Wspólpracy z Rządem* or BBWR, dominated by Pilsudski until his death in 1935 won over a third of the seats in the government ushering in his authoritarian rule which, after his death, became open authoritarianism.

⁶ See contributions of Fayvl Yavitch later Philip Alwin in Dovid Katz's *Yizkorbook for Mikhaleshik*.

we met a Jew and he asked us: *Nu, what things does your father tell?* And we stare at him, not understanding what is it about. And he says: *Don't you know? I was at home and I've heard that your father came.* It was Thursday afternoon, and we have decided to go home. And at 12 at night we have returned from the village, and we came just in time for the candle blessing.

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I would like to mention that at the time when my father was away, my mother used to treat me with respect as the oldest son. They used to wait on me before starting to eat, and on Fridays I did *hamotzi* blessing over 2 challahs⁷ and so forth.

When the father returned, he took over his place and rights and in a short time the family moved to a village in the vicinity. While in Michaleshik there were a lot of blacksmiths, in a village like Bobrownik,⁸ that was even bigger than Michaleshik, there was not a single one. I remained in the *shtetl*, and with time I became my own master. With time I grew older, and I started to look at girls and there came to my eyes *a yunge meydl, nit kayn yidishe* (a young girl, who was not Jewish). I used to visit her from time to time, and it became known in *shtetl*, and *es iz gevorn freylekh un men gevolt rateven mayn neshome* (it started to be merry and people wanted to save my soul). And I've heard from the *Hekhalutz Hatsair*⁹ that they wanted to send me to stay at a *kibbutz*, and so I went for a year and a half to the *Kibbutz Vaarba*, but then I saw that it was not for me, I left the *kibbutz* and returned to the *shtetl*. My horse and wagon remained with my parents, and I started to work and took up all kinds of jobs, even in the forest, bringing the logs from the woods to the river.

In 1939 at the beginning of the war I was in the forest, and when I returned to the *shtetl*, I encountered the Russians. And as the Russians took over, I was a policeman for a short time, and then they told me that I have to go and study at courses in Russia and become a police officer. I have refused that, and they sent me to Old Vileyka to become a tax inspector. In 1940 I was taken into the army and sent to Tajikistan (Stalinabad, Dushanbe).¹⁰ With the beginning of the Russian-German war they took me from the military and sent to Kirgizia (Frunze),¹¹ to a construction battalion where I worked as a welder. There in 1943 I have married a girl from Odessa,¹² and in 1944 my wife went with her mother to her city of Odessa after it was liberated from the Germans, while I remained mobilized till 1945 when I was able to free myself. And in 1946 we went to Poland. In 1955 our daughter was born, and in 1957 we moved to the Land of Israel.

⁷ Braided white bread eaten on *Shabbos*.

⁸ Possibly Bovrovniki, Bobeowniki (now Belarus), 54°44'N, 26°04'E, about seven miles SSW of Michaleshik.

⁹ Hekhalutz Hatsair, Hechalutz Hatzair (The Young Pioneer) was a Jewish youth movement established in the 1920's that trained young people for agricultural settlement in Eretz Israel.

¹⁰ Stalinabad, earlier Dyushambe, now Dushanbe, was from 1929-1991 the capital of Tajikistan.

¹¹ Frunze, since 1991 Bishkek, earlier Pishpek was the capital of Kyrgyzstan from 1926-1991.

¹² Odessa, the third largest city in Ukraine, located on Black Sea in southern Ukraine.