

Commissioner Lee Seeman  
Commission for the Preservation of  
America's Heritage Abroad  
Great Neck, New York

Dear Commissioner Seeman:

Since we met at the Commission's meeting about a year ago, I have been busy working on my Bat Mitzvah project to help raise funds for the preservation/restoration of the Jewish cemetery in Serock, Poland. I am pleased to let you know that I have already raised \$1,300.00 and have enclosed a check made out to the Commission. I am working with my temple and family to come up with many more ways to raise additional funds. I met with the Cantor at my temple to come up with a further plan of action. I'm, as well as other things, writing a letter in the temple newsletter to the congregation (around 4,000 individual members) describing the project and the need to raise funds; getting in touch with a rabbi in Warsaw (that our temple knows from the reform movement) who can help facilitate; putting together a mitzvah table in the lobby of my religious school to sell items to raise funds; going to the Foundation Center in Washington D.C. to search for philanthropic agencies to petition for funds; and making a presentation to the clergy at my temple to solicit funds from their discretionary funds. I hope that these efforts will help to raise more funds in the near future. I am sorry for the somewhat delayed correspondence to you but my dad was deployed last year to Afghanistan and this interrupted my effort and focus.

Enclosed also please find a letter I wrote, at your request when we met, to some family and friends my grandma gave me that have ties to Serock. You mentioned that you wanted to send a letter to them with my letter enclosed to try to raise more funds. I thought it might be nice to send the Commission website information as well so that they could see what the Commission has on its agenda. I have given you a separate list of their names and addresses to go with my letter. My grandma has not been in touch with many on this list for a long time so it is hard to say whether they are still good addresses or that they are still alive.

In addition, I also have enclosed at your request a write-up that I wrote with my mom on how my grandma survived the Holocaust and how she escaped by hiding in the Serock Cemetery. I hope this helps you in your efforts. Please be assured that I am continuing my efforts and I hope that we can be successful. I know my grandma is very proud of what we are doing.

Sincerely,



Hannah Champness  
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### The Story of My Grandma: Diana Albert (Doba Drezner):

My grandma, Diana Albert, was born Doba Drezner around 1932 (year of birth is questionable due to some destroyed records- we joke and say she has two birthdays) in Serock, Poland. Serock is a town on the outskirts of Warsaw where two rivers merge. Today it contains a number of hotels that seek people who want to come to a spa formed at the merging of the rivers. It is a few miles away from one of the Radziwill Palaces.

My grandma lived with her parents and a brother on Warszawska Ulcia (Warsaw Street). The Jewish part of town contained pretty much only Jewish residences. According to people who my family has spoken to, the Jews lived primarily in small, mostly two-floor houses that were very old. The town was evenly split – there were about 3,500 Jews and 3,500 Poles that existed together and tolerated each other and, pretty much, got along. The Jews engaged in trades such as tailors, shoemakers, wagon wheel makers, and blacksmiths. There was a big temple in the town (grosseshiel) on Buznicka Ulcia.

My grandma's father, David, was a Yeshiva school teacher who taught Hebrew, and her mother, Yente (maiden name Kolender), owned a small dress shop in town. They lived in a house in the Jewish section near other Drezner and Kolender family. My grandma had an older brother, Alter, a few years older, who she was very close with and many aunts and uncles and cousins. Her paternal uncles had all immigrated to the United States and her father, the youngest, remained to take care of his mother (my great-great grandmother), who would not leave Poland, as well as three sisters who also remained.

In 1939, the Nazis invaded Poland and eventually came to Serock. My grandma remembers hiding under her bed. Her father was in a neighboring town, Legionow, visiting one of his sisters. According to my grandma, Germans got on the loudspeakers and said to assemble in the town square the next day and to pack because they were going to be going to the big city. My great-grandmother, alone without her husband and sensing the danger for her and her kids, waited until evening, packed what they could carry, and then snuck out of the house through the windows into the dark. My grandma told me that they were very afraid because they knew the Germans were watching the houses so that they could raid goods from inside. There were orders to lock the doors so that the Poles would not loot the houses and so that the Germans could.

My grandma's house was very close to the Jewish cemetery – just a few blocks away. According to my grandma's memory, and remembering it from the eyes of a child, the cemetery seemed very large. They all hid behind a mausoleum type structure. It loomed very large in my grandma's eyes – bigger than the ordinary tombstones. My grandma was very scared. They stayed until 4:00 or 5:00 in the morning and then escaped to Legionow to meet up with my grandma's father. Unfortunately, that too became overrun with Germans and it became a small ghetto. It is there, a short while later, that my great grandmother died either of disease and hunger. It is also there that my grandma's brother, who was about three years older and told by the Germans that if the young teen boys would go off to work they would get some promised food, left never to be heard from again. She is not sure how long she spent in that town.

And so it was just my grandma and her father who remained. Then another round-up took the Jews by train to the Warsaw Ghetto. My grandma said it was horrible. She remembers seeing dead people in the street and at first it scared her but over time she didn't notice so much. They lived

in my grandma's aunt's apartment (who had lived in Warsaw) with her aunt and cousins and felt lucky they had somewhere to go as people were sleeping on the street. Her aunt and cousins knew people in the Judenrat (the Jewish Council established by the Nazis). My grandma worked for the Nazis sewing clothes (a trade she had learned from her mother the dress shop owner) having gotten the work and the little food she was paid from her aunt's connections. After some time in the ghetto, my grandma's aunt learned from sources in the Judenrat that Jews were being taken to concentration camps and their time was coming soon. Her aunt, father, and cousins prepared my grandma to escape. My grandma was small, like I am, and her family knew that she might have a chance at escaping. They taught her Catholic prayers and how to say the rosary. They devised a plan that she was to pretend to be Christian and say that her parents died in the invasion. They knew of a drain around the wall that led to the other side. They measured her head to see if she could fit. They knew when the guards changed shift.

One night, her father and a cousin went to the drain because they knew a round-up was coming the next day to take Jews to concentration camps. They brought some cloth and placed it over a hammer and quietly broke a few bricks from the wall. They then pushed her into the muddy drain and the slightly larger opening. Her cousin ran away but she remembers seeing her father looking down into the hole – frozen in place and crying. My grandma knew he wouldn't leave and she was afraid that the Germans would kill him, so waved her hand at him to leave and she crawled away to the other side with the picture seared in her memory of her father looking down at her crying. To this day, she has only spoken of this part rarely to my mom and her voice cracks when she does and she stops describing it. She has shared some of her background with my mom and me. It is the only time my mom has ever saw my grandma express emotion when she describes her past life. She had witnessed as a child a lot of death and hardship in a short time.

My grandma ran in the dark and got to the river and some men in a boat helped her across the river and pushed her onto the river bank where she began the next phase of her journey to survival. Alone, frozen with icicles from swimming the last part of the river in the wintertime, she was ten years old. For the next few years, my grandma survived by going to work in the countryside at different farms for different families. Some were kind, others were not. Some hid her, some beat her but she would always escape. There were many more harrowing stories. She survived Russian bombing runs, disease and hunger. When the war ended she eventually made her way back to Serock to look for her family. Most were dead. The few others were gone. Records were destroyed and the villagers were not glad to see her and she feared for her life – yet again. That was the last time she set foot in her childhood home.

She went to live in a children's orphanage in Czystachowa. Very few children survived the Warsaw Ghetto. Likewise, very few Jews of Serock survived the war and even fewer of the children. Today, there are no Jews in the town. According to some people we talked to, only two remained after the war. Both had intermarried with locals and died long ago. In talking to my grandma, the one thing that stayed in her memory was that hiding in that cemetery saved her life. And I am here today because of that. My grandma eventually was adopted by her uncle in the United States where she met my grandpa, a Flossenburg concentration camp survivor also from Poland. My mom had some Jewish and non-Jewish friends who visited Serock and said that the cemetery was destroyed after the war to make way for a recreation or athletic field and that the stones from the cemetery were used to pave sidewalks and to make foundations for buildings. The few headstones that remained were put on the side of hill where they lay to this day. I do know that my ancestors were buried there.