

▶ The Names Database

Congratulations— You Have an Aunt!

by Yifat Bachrach-Ron

“Congratulations, Dad—you have an aunt!” exclaimed Nurit Margalit to her astonished father Amir, after her search of Yad Vashem’s online Names Database last Holocaust Remembrance Day revealed that her grandmother’s sister, thought to have perished in the *Shoah*, was in fact still alive.

Nurit originally visited the website to search for Pages of Testimony that her late grandmother, Malka Margalit, had completed. Malka had died in a traffic accident in 1966 when Amir was just 12 years old, and all he could tell Nurit was that her grandmother had a number tattooed on her arm, and that Malka’s entire family had been murdered in the Holocaust. “I grew up with the knowledge that no-one from my father’s parents’ families had survived,” Nurit explained. “My grandparents were left alone in the world after the concentration camps. More than anything else, I was bothered by the lack of information about my grandmother—we didn’t even know her maiden name.”



A Family Reunited: center, left to right, Moshe and Paula Eizenberg; Amir Margalit; front row, center, Nurit Margalit

Through her search, Nurit established that her grandmother had completed Pages of Testimony in 1955, and discovered Malka’s former surname (Blitz), her exact place of residence before the war, and the names of her close relatives. However, thanks to the Database’s retrieval capabilities, Nurit also found that another woman had completed Pages of Testimony for the same people her grandmother had sought to commemorate, and that the familial relationships stated by the two women were identical. The woman, Paula Eizenberg, had also mentioned the name of her sister on the Page of Testimony dedicated to her parents—Malka. “This was when it dawned on me that Paula Eizenberg was my grandmother’s sister,” Nurit explains. “I realized that each sister thought the other had perished, when in fact they lived just 17 kilometers away from each other.”

Despite the late hour, Amir Margalit immediately telephoned Paula and Moshe Eizenberg at their residence Kibbutz Nir David. “It was 11:30pm. I couldn’t calm down; I just had to find out if it was true. My aunt, who is now 84 years old, was very excited. We agreed to meet. I didn’t sleep the whole night.”

The moving reunion between the two families—at which three generations were present—took place on the kibbutz. “I lost my mother at the age of 12,” says Amir. “To find my mother’s big sister brought back my feelings as a child towards my mother. I’m so grateful to Yad Vashem, who made it possible for me to find this wonderful extended family.”

Enlisting the Community

Jewish Genealogical Internet forums, seminars and meetings of survivors and next generation groups, Jewish educator conferences, *landsmanshaft* societies (aid organizations for immigrants from the same town of origin), immigrant housing projects and veteran groups from the former Soviet army in Israel are some of the venues where Yad Vashem is currently presenting the *Shoah* Names Recovery Project. “We’re hoping to reach our target audiences through the organizations and groups they are associated with,” explains Cynthia Wroclawski, the project’s outreach manager. “These groups can best promote the project by assisting their members to fill in Pages of Testimony, and returning them to Yad Vashem.”

Following is a sample of some of the recent platforms where the Names Recovery Project has recently been presented:

During the month of April, the Names Recovery Project was launched in **Ukraine**. Presentations were made in Kiev, Lvov, Dneproptrovsk and Kharkov in the presence of Israel’s Ambassador to Ukraine, community leaders and supporters, and local Jewish organizations joining the project, including the Joint, Nativ, the Jewish Agency, Hillel, Chabad, and Holocaust



Boris Maftsir (center) presents the Names Recovery Project in Ukraine

research and education centers such as Tkuma and the Ukrainian Center for Holocaust Studies. Boris Maftsir, Manager of the Names Recovery Project in the FSU and Russian-speaking countries, met a well-known Jewish businessman from Dneproptrovsk whose grandfather lost almost his entire family at the Babi Yar massacre in 1941. “Although he is a great supporter of the Jewish community and makes frequent visits to Israel, he was not aware that the names of his relatives would not be commemorated in the Yad Vashem Names Database unless he filled out Pages of Testimony,” recalled Maftsir.

The **Limud conference**—a celebration of Jewish life and learning—took place on 12-14 May, in Moscow. Participants included community members, educators, Hillel students, Jewish groups and community leaders and supporters. Chairman of the Yad Vashem Directorate Avner Shalev and Boris Maftsir presented the Names Recovery Project.

The **Amigur** Immigrant Absorption Housing project, sponsored by the Jewish Agency in Israel, announced its enlistment in the Names Recovery Project by encouraging Amigur residents from the FSU to complete Pages of Testimony. The announcement was made on 7 May in advance of VE Day during a ceremony at Yad Vashem in which Amigur presented a collection of one thousand survivor testimonies to Avner Shalev.

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