

# Contents

Preface: So That Our Descendants Shall Know. . . . .	XI
Introduction: In Spite of It All: What's in a Name?? . . . . .	XXIII
Author's Foreword from the Hebrew Edition:	
Living <i>Al Kiddush Hashem</i> . . . . .	XXVII
Translator's Foreword . . . . .	XXIX
Prologue. . . . .	1
Chapter One: Family Roots . . . . .	3
Chapter Two: A Welcome Respite . . . . .	9
Chapter Three: Life, Liberty, and Livelihood . . . . .	19
Chapter Four: The Leather Goods Factory . . . . .	27
Chapter Five: An Alef-Beis Extravaganza . . . . .	32
Chapter Six: Growing Up. . . . .	34
Chapter Seven: The Apples and the Tree. . . . .	40
Chapter Eight: The Refugees Arrive . . . . .	52
Chapter Nine: Hatred in the Air . . . . .	65
Chapter Ten: Destination: Eretz Yisrael! . . . . .	68
Chapter Eleven: From Innocence to Inferno. . . . .	75
Chapter Twelve: Financial Embargo . . . . .	86
Chapter Thirteen: Money Becomes Jewelry . . . . .	88
Chapter Fourteen: Every Jew Has a Portion in Olam HaBa . . . . .	91
Chapter Fifteen: Austria's Last Gasps . . . . .	94
Chapter Sixteen: Austria's Bitter End . . . . .	100
Chapter Seventeen: Our First Night under Hitler. . . . .	107

Chapter Eighteen: Under the Heels of the Nazis . . . . .	116
Chapter Nineteen: A Catastrophic Decision. . . . .	122
Chapter Twenty: No Entry. . . . .	129
Chapter Twenty-One: A Shocking Transformation. . . . .	136
Chapter Twenty-Two: Cold Feet, Warm Heart. . . . .	141
Chapter Twenty-Three: Between Two Evils. . . . .	147
Chapter Twenty-Four: Confiscation and Devastation. . . . .	157
Chapter Twenty-Five: Escape — For a Price! . . . . .	162
Chapter Twenty-Six: Kristallnacht . . . . .	173
Chapter Twenty-Seven: Shipment to New York . . . . .	184
Chapter Twenty-Eight: Behind the Double Wall . . . . .	190
Chapter Twenty-Nine: Despite the Danger . . . . .	195
Chapter Thirty: Terror in the Forest . . . . .	200
Chapter Thirty-One: The Tzaddikim of Antwerp . . . . .	209
Chapter Thirty-Two: Five Thousand Carats . . . . .	213
Chapter Thirty-Three: Between Two Trees . . . . .	219
Chapter Thirty-Four: Czechoslovakia Is Dismembered! . . . . .	231
Chapter Thirty-Five: An Evil Collaboration . . . . .	236
Chapter Thirty-Six: My Grandfather Is Trapped. . . . .	240
Chapter Thirty-Seven: Desperate to Escape . . . . .	251
Chapter Thirty-Eight: Antwerp under Attack. . . . .	255
Chapter Thirty-Nine: A Blockade of Balloons . . . . .	263
Chapter Forty: Back to Antwerp. . . . .	272
Chapter Forty-One: <i>Baruch Sheptarani</i> and Kaddish . . . . .	282
Chapter Forty-Two: Cast Out Your Bread . . . . .	287
Chapter Forty-Three: A German Officer at the Door . . . . .	296
Chapter Forty-Four: The Yellow Star . . . . .	302
Chapter Forty-Five: En Route to Brussels. . . . .	308
Chapter Forty-Six: In the Dead of Night . . . . .	315
Chapter Forty-Seven: In the Partisans' Fortress. . . . .	319
Chapter Forty-Eight: Thwarted Escape. . . . .	329

Chapter Forty-Nine: “Neutral” Switzerland . . . . .	333
Chapter Fifty: Ghastly Sounds in the Night . . . . .	342
Chapter Fifty-One: The Transit to Drancy . . . . .	348
Chapter Fifty-Two: Sanctity Clashes with Impurity . . . . .	359
Chapter Fifty-Three: Packed in a Freight Car . . . . .	365
Chapter Fifty-Four: At the Gates of Gehinnom . . . . .	370
Chapter Fifty-Five: A Kick to Life . . . . .	384
Chapter Fifty-Six: “Shake Off the Dust” in Lechah Dodi . . . . .	392
Chapter Fifty-Seven: <i>Hoshiah es Amecha!</i> . . . . .	399
Chapter Fifty-Eight: A Life-Saving <i>Psak</i> . . . . .	409
Chapter Fifty-Nine: The Barracks-Building Unit . . . . .	414
Chapter Sixty: Good Night, Good Health, and Hopefully, Good Morning! . . . . .	428
Chapter Sixty-One: Ottmuth — “Sign of Death” . . . . .	434
Chapter Sixty-Two: Tefillin in Auschwitz . . . . .	446
Chapter Sixty-Three: <i>Tefillos</i> from the Depths. . . . .	452
Chapter Sixty-Four: Who by Torture . . . . .	459
Chapter Sixty-Five: The Terrible Secret of the Soap . . . . .	466
Chapter Sixty-Six: Torment at Blechhammer . . . . .	477
Chapter Sixty-Seven: A Chilling Count . . . . .	489
Chapter Sixty-Eight: <i>Yamim Nora'im</i> — September–October 1944 . . . . .	495
Chapter Sixty-Nine: A Sandwich in the Corner . . . . .	501
Chapter Seventy: October–November 1944 . . . . .	508
Chapter Seventy-One: An Eternal <i>Shema Yisrael</i> . . . . .	514
Chapter Seventy-Two: October–December 1944 . . . . .	519
Chapter Seventy-Three: Death March to Life . . . . .	527
Chapter Seventy-Four: In His Death He Gave Me Life . . . . .	535
Chapter Seventy-Five: The Torment Continues . . . . .	543
Chapter Seventy-Six: A Brilliant Idea . . . . .	549
Chapter Seventy-Seven: An Agonizing Decision . . . . .	554
Chapter Seventy-Eight: Liberation . . . . .	560

Chapter Seventy-Nine: The Tables Are Turned . . . . .	570
Chapter Eighty: An Orphan Searches for His Mother . . . . .	575
Chapter Eighty-One: A Minyan for Kaddish Yasom. . . . .	579
Chapter Eighty-Two: Secrets from the Past. . . . .	587
Chapter Eighty-Three: Austria Is Divided. . . . .	607
Chapter Eighty-Four: America or Russia?. . . . .	616
Chapter Eighty-Five: Matzos for the Polkovnik . . . . .	624
Chapter Eighty-Six: The General's Secret . . . . .	628
Chapter Eighty-Seven: Not by Bread Alone . . . . .	632
Chapter Eighty-Eight: The Arab SS . . . . .	644
Chapter Eighty-Nine: Home to Our Father . . . . .	660
Chapter Ninety: For the Sake of the Children . . . . .	667
Chapter Ninety-One: Have You Killed and Also Taken Possession?! . . .	672
Chapter Ninety-Two: A Gem of a Jew . . . . .	674
Chapter Ninety-Three: A Heavenly Entourage . . . . .	682
Chapter Ninety-Four: Rebuilding . . . . .	692
Chapter Ninety-Five: <i>Borei Refu'os, Nora Tehillos</i> . . . . .	699

## CHAPTER ONE

# Family Roots

**M**y grandfather, Reb Yisroel Kern was born in Antinia, a small town near Kolomyia at the edge of Galicia, one of the many children in the large family of Rav Yosef Kern.<sup>1</sup> Reb Yisroel left Antinia for Kolomyia.

Our lineage on my mother's side connects us to the holy Rebbe, Reb Menachem Mendel of Rimanov, *zy" a*, and I recall that, as a young child, I was told that I was a sixth-generation descendant of the Rebbe Reb Mende'le, as the tzaddik was lovingly called.<sup>2</sup>

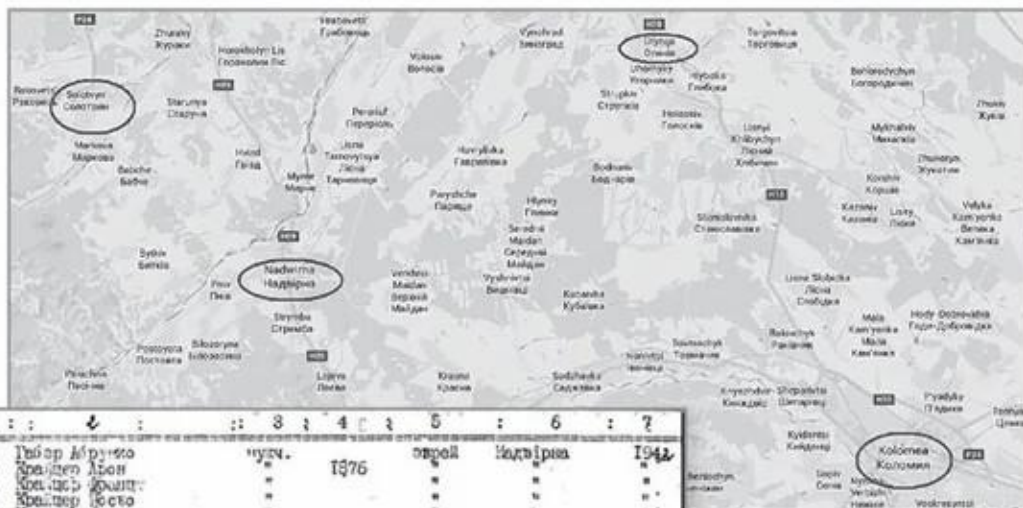
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1. After extensive research in various Holocaust archives and other genealogical searches, we are fairly certain that the Kern family was a large and distinguished one with branches living in Kolomyia, Antinia, Nadvorna, and Salatvina. The Kerns were direct descendants of the tzaddik, the holy Rebbe, the Gaon Rav Yitzchak Aizik HaCohen of Koritz, *zt" l*, author of *Bris Kehumas Olam*. In his *sefer*, the author printed a family tree of his lineage, tracing back to Ezra HaSofer on his father's side and to Hillel HaBavli — from Malchus Beis David, on his mother's. On the other side, the Kern family traces itself to the *rosh av beis din* of Stanislav, the nephew of the Gaon Rav Yechezkel Landau, *zt" l*, known as the Noda BeYehuda, Rav of Prague.

Our hallowed patriarch, Rav Yisroel Kern, married Esther née Fogel. The Fogel family is also known by the surname of my grandfather Esther's maternal grandmother, Salzhauer. The name "Koppel" was very common in the Salzhauer family since they were direct descendants of the famed Rav Koppel Chassid. They kept their maiden name, Salzhauer, out of necessity, since they got married halachically instead of registering a legal marriage certificate with the authorities. The Salzhauer-Fogel family was also a large and flourishing one. According to one of the older surviving members of the family, the family used to live on Krimmestrasse and would daven at a shul called "The 11 Shul."

2. The Rebbe Reb Mende'le, *zy" a*, known as "The Rebbe Reb," one of the select few of the

## In Spite of It All



I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
188.	Крайцер Адриано	мужч.	1876	свояк	Колумія	1944
189.	Крайцер Арон	"	"	"	"	"
190.	Крайцер Арон	"	"	"	"	"
191.	Крайцер Ієсто	"	"	"	"	"
192.	Крайцер Ієсто	"	"	"	"	"
193.	Крайцер Ієсто	"	"	"	"	"
194.	Крайцер Ієсто	"	"	"	"	"
195.	Крайцер Ієсто	"	"	"	"	"
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205.	Крайцер Ієсто	"	"	"	"	"
206.	Крайцер Ієсто	"	"	"	"	"
207.	Крайцер Ієсто	"	"	"	"	"
208.	Крайцер Ієсто	"	"	"	"	"
209.	Крайцер Ієсто	"	"	"	"	"
210.	Крайцер Ієсто	"	"	"	"	"
211.	Крайцер Ієсто	"	"	"	"	"

From the four corners of the earth  
The four villages where the extended Kern family lived are marked on the map.

### Residents of Nadvorna

Seven residents of Nadvorna by the name of Kern listed on an official document issued by the Russian government



### Greeting the Kaiser

The victorious emperor, Karl I, is greeted by *rabbanim* on a visit to Kolomyia

## The Wandering Jew

Throughout history, the Jews have always been convenient scapegoats, especially during wartime when morale is low and tensions are high. World War I, which ominously struck Europe on the infamous day of Tishah B'Av 5674, July 1, 1914, was no exception. Over 16.5 million people lost their lives in the terrible war, and approximately forty percent of the casualties were civilians. Although the numbers cannot be measured precisely, it is estimated that 250,000-500,000 Jews served in the various armies that fought during World War I, and between 140,000 to 170,000 of these Jews died in battle, although the actual numbers may have been even higher.

Nations all across Europe suffered terribly during the war, but the Jews were persecuted and tormented even more. Each side of the conflict blamed the Jews for the outbreak of the war, and both sides suspected the Jews of being unfaithful to their homelands. The tragic outcome of Jews fighting on both sides of the warfront made for unspeakably tragic results. A Russian soldier would fire a shot at an Austrian or German fighter, only to discover he was a Jew. Stories abound of bloody battles in which cries of "*Shema Yisrael!*" resounded on both sides of the battleground, as Jewish soldiers breathed their last.

On both sides of the conflict, the bloodthirsty armies vented their fury on the Jews. When the Russian Cossacks broke into Eastern Galicia, they immediately sought out the Jewish villages which they pillaged and ravaged. When they reached Kolomyia, they launched a pogrom and slaughtered every Jew they could find. The Jews were well aware of the rabid hatred and cruelty that the Cossacks had dealt them in the past. Most notoriously, during the years known as *Tach v'Tat* (1648-1649), under the leadership of the evil Bohdan Khmelnytsky, *yemach shemo*, the Jews of Poland, Ukraine, and Belarus were ferociously murdered in the most grotesque of ways. The 20<sup>th</sup> of Sivan is the day that marks our mourning for those many thousands of our brethren who were killed during *gezeiros Tach v'Tat*, and the custom is to fast and recite Selichos.

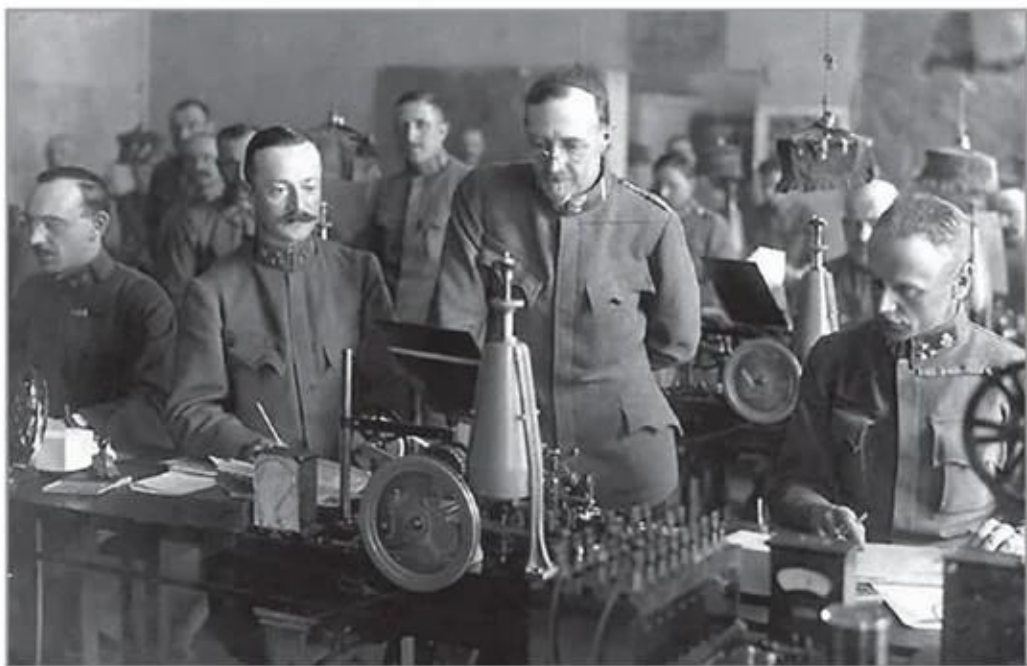
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Baal Shem Tov's *talmidim* who were referred to by a double title, was born to Rav Yosef Charif in the year 5505 (1745). The Rebbe Reb Mende'le was a close *talmid* of the holy Rebbe Reb Shmelke of Nikolsburg, *zy"o*, and ultimately became a *talmid* of the holy Rebbe, Reb Elimelech of Lizensk, *zy"o*, the Noam Elimelech. The Rebbe Reb Mende'le was the *baal shacharis* for Rosh HaShanah in the *beis midrash* of the Noam Elimelech, who testified about Reb Mende'le that "sparks of fire emanate from his forehead."

On the 19<sup>th</sup> of Iyar 5575 (1815), the Rebbe Reb Mende'le left This World and his *talmidim*, some of the greatest rebbes of Galicia, continued to perpetuate his holy work. Among them were the holy Rebbe, Reb Tzvi Hirsch of Rimanov, *zy"o*, the holy Rebbe, Reb Naftoli of Ropschitz, *zy"o*, the holy Rebbe, Reb Tzvi Hirsch of Zidichov, *zy"o*, the holy Rebbe, Reb Tzvi Elimelech of Dinov, *zy"o* (The Bnei Yissoschar), and the holy Rav, Reb Yechezkel Paneth, *zy"o*.



**“Shema Yisrael” soldiers**  
Jewish soldiers in World War I



**Communication by telegraph**  
A military telegraph unit near Baden in World War I





**Portrait of a chassid**  
 Reb Yisroel Kern – a  
 burning torch of  
*emunah*, honesty, and  
 love of mankind

**En route**

The Polish passport of Zeide Reb Yisroel Kern

The Cossacks, who entered Galicia some 250 years later during World War I, followed directly in the footsteps of their ancestors, mercilessly pouncing upon the Jews like wild beasts, and many communities fled for their lives. My grandfather, Reb Yisroel Kern, was one of those who escaped Kolomyia by the skin of his teeth, and sought refuge, together with his family, in the town of Stanislav. In retrospect, I see now that this would be the first of the countless escapes and endless efforts to resettle in safety that the Kern family would embark upon, a process that would repeat itself over the course of close to *thirty years*, with only short breaks here and there. In essence, the Kern family was destined to suffer acute exile and uprooting from the outbreak of World War I until the end of World War II.

Unfortunately, Reb Yisroel's sojourn in Stanislav did not bring with it the safety he sought. As the Russian front approached, it brought the very real danger of

**In Spite of It All**

another wave of pogroms and Cossack cruelty. Reb Yisroel Kern and his family were forced to run from city to city, fleeing to Western Galicia.

They arrived in the city of Stryi, then ran to Przemyśl, but upon their arrival it became clear that they had gone from the frying pan into the fire. As the forces of war heated up to boiling point, Przemyśl had become the central front in the war! The city was caught between opposing forces, each fighting to gain control, and its government changed over and over again, from Russian hands to Austrian hands. As always, the Jews were the direct address for both armies to vent their frustration, and the Jews of Przemyśl had no choice but to run for their lives.

The Kerns escaped to Western Galicia via Reisha (known as Rzeszow today), stopping for a short time in Sanok, and from there they traveled to nearby Rimanov. Their final destination in this long and arduous journey was Krakow.

רשימת המתנדבים לקופת רבי מאיר בעה"נ וע"א לשם כולל חב"ת ירושלים  
לעדת נאליציען באה"ק ת"ז

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2	רבי יצחק	100	2	רבי יצחק	100
3	רבי יצחק	100	3	רבי יצחק	100
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