

TIME FRAME: MAY 1940 - DECEMBER 1941
(Eighteen Months)

Primarily, this is the story of four families -- the four youngest children of Bubeshe* (For more about them, where they came from.... see Appendix A & B).

Chumtze, Solomon, Chiel, Tsipora

Three couples had two children. My parents had three.

I was almost exactly two years old when all this began, by far the youngest of the eleven children in this story. I remember none of the events but I have become the gatherer” of recollections: the family historian.

Fayge Bayle Morgenstein (born 1863), had 11 children, at 3 year intervals:

- | | | | |
|--------------------|------|-----------------------|------|
| 1. Yitzchak Velvel | 1878 | 7. (Still born child) | 1896 |
| 2. Esther Malka | 1881 | 8. Nachuma (Chumtze) | 1898 |
| 3. Chaim Bearish | 1884 | 9. Schloimo | 1903 |
| 4. Moishe Yosef | 1887 | 10. Chiel | 1906 |
| 5. Menachem Mendel | 1890 | 11. Tzipora | 1909 |
| 6. Nicholea | 1893 | | |

The central question asked by all who were not there is "Why did you not run away when you heard all the rumors?" There are many answers to that question but here are a few.

The family had already run away from Poland to Belgium. Poland was the country that persecuted Jews, killed Jews for no discernible reason. All of you have heard of "Pogroms" - a periodic "wiping out" of Jews. Pogroms occurred with some frequency in Poland. The whole family desperately wanted to leave Poland and after WWI there was a gradual migration to Belgium.

JEWIS IN POLAND (Wikipedia)

From the founding of the Kingdom of Poland in 1025 through to the early years of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth created in 1569, Poland was the most tolerant country in Europe. Known as paradisus Iudaeorum (Latin for Jewish paradise) it became a unique shelter for persecuted and expelled European Jewish communities and a home to the world's largest Jewish community.

According to some sources, about three-quarters of all Jews lived in Poland by the middle of the 16th century...in the aftermath of World War I, it was the center of the European Jewish world with one of world's largest Jewish communities of over 3 million. Anti-Semitism, however, from both the political establishment and from the general population, common throughout Europe, was a growing problem. At the start of World War II, Poland was partitioned between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union (see: Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact). The war resulted in the death of one-fifth of the Polish population, with 90% or about 3 million of Polish Jewry killed along with approximately 3 million Polish Gentiles.

Antwerp Belgium, welcomed Jews because Jews were productive members of a particularly lucrative industry, the diamond industry. Up until the 1930s Amsterdam was the diamond capital of the world, but Antwerp enacted some favourable-to-diamond-cutters tax laws and in the mid 1930s the diamond capital of the world shifted to Antwerp, Belgium. Something like 75% of the people in the diamond trade were Jews.

JEWIS IN BELGIUM (Wikipedia)

Just before the Second World War, the Jewish community of Belgium was at its peak of roughly 70,000 Jews (with concentrations of **35,000 in Antwerp** and 25,000 in Brussels). Some 22,000 of this number were German Jewish refugees. **Only 6 % of the Jewish population were of Belgian nationality.** Belgium was occupied by Nazi Germany between May 1940 and September 1944, and anti-Semitic policies were adopted throughout Belgium, even though popular resistance in some cities hindered their full application. Belgian local police rounded up Jews, on three occasions in Antwerp and one in Brussels, helping the German in fulfilling their murderous policy towards the Jews. Approximately 45% of Jews in Belgium were deported to concentration camps, primarily Auschwitz. Only 1200 of them survived the war. The Committee for Jewish Defence, which worked with the national resistance movement Front de l'Indépendance, was the largest Jewish defense movement in Belgium during the war. **Some Jews of Belgium who fled in 1940 were deported on transports from Drancy, France.** All told, some 28,900 Jews of Belgium perished between 1942 and 1945. Belgium was the only occupied country in which a transport (Train XX) was halted to give deportees a chance to escape.

Our family's migration from Poland to Belgium was slow, painstaking. For instance, once my Uncle Chiel finished his apprenticeship and was earning a meager living, he urged my father to come to Antwerp and become an apprentice - a diamond cutter. Uncle Chiel supported his brother, Schloimo my father, for as long as it took him to learn the trade. Once he learned, they became life-long business partners in the diamond trade. Another such an apprentice in the diamond trade was my mother. My father met my mother when she was learning to cut diamonds and he soon "retired" her by marrying her.

Antwerp, Belgium, had a huge, somewhat segregated, community of prospering Jews. Life was good. "Big" Henry, Uncle Chiel's son, remembers that he lived in a building across the street from a lovely park. My mother recalls walks in the park with her children - and the children were always accompanied by a Nanny. Big Henry remembers his family employed a Jewish Czechoslovakian girl. Basically, we were middle class, upper middle class citizens, who were leading comfortable lives.

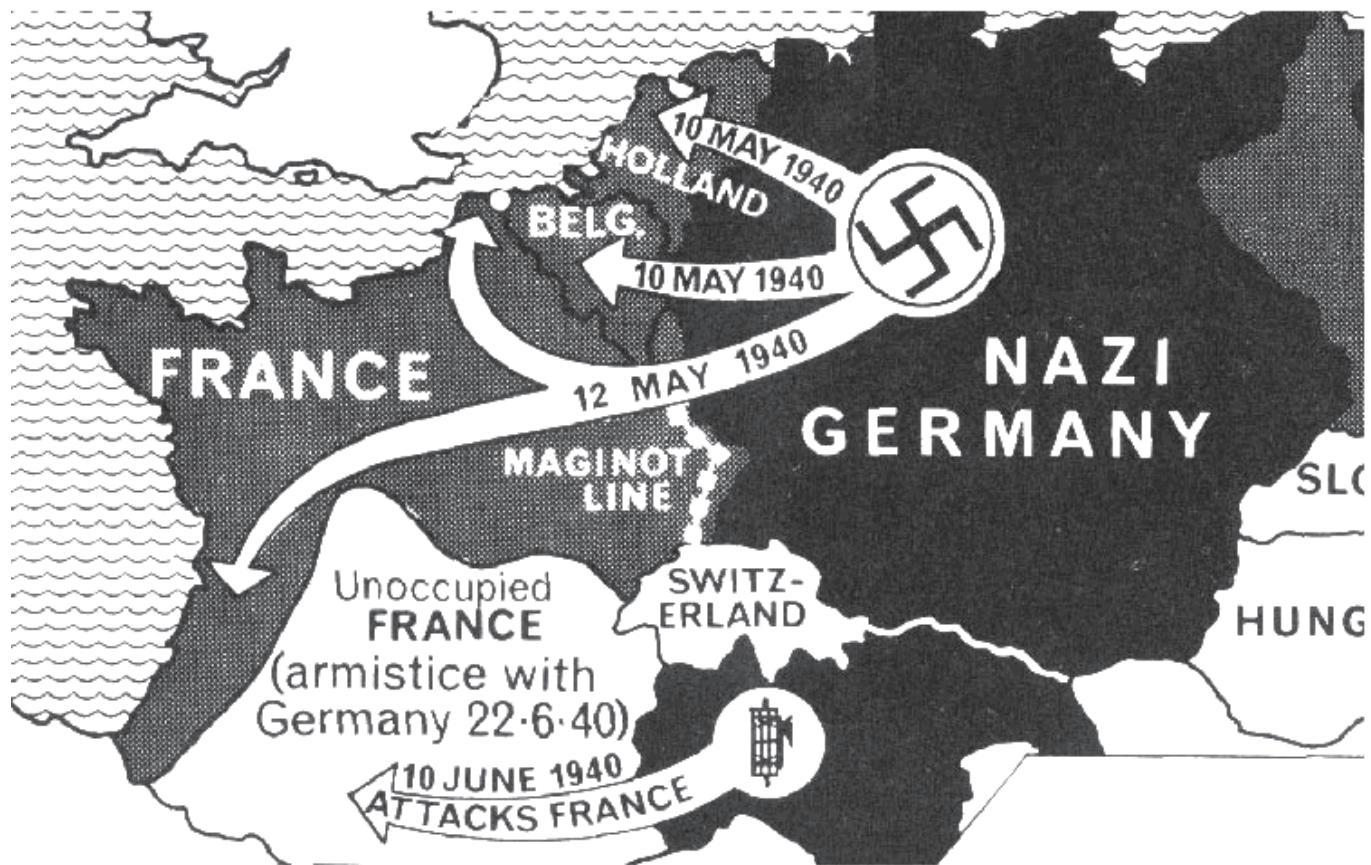
We thought about possibly leaving Antwerp, but what country would accept Jews, especially Jews with Polish passports? It was very difficult to become a Belgian Citizen; it required an act of Congress. The world was full of countries that were hostile to Jews. Belgium welcomed Jews. That was one of the reasons we did not run away even in 1938 when the Germans attacked Poland and conquered Poland.

Another reason we did not flee is that we had this false belief that if war broke out we could flee to the coastal town of DePanne (known to my family by its French name: LaPanne). During WWI the Germans did not occupy LaPanne. We felt LaPanne was so far away from Germany that we could stay there for years before the Germans pushed through to LaPanne.

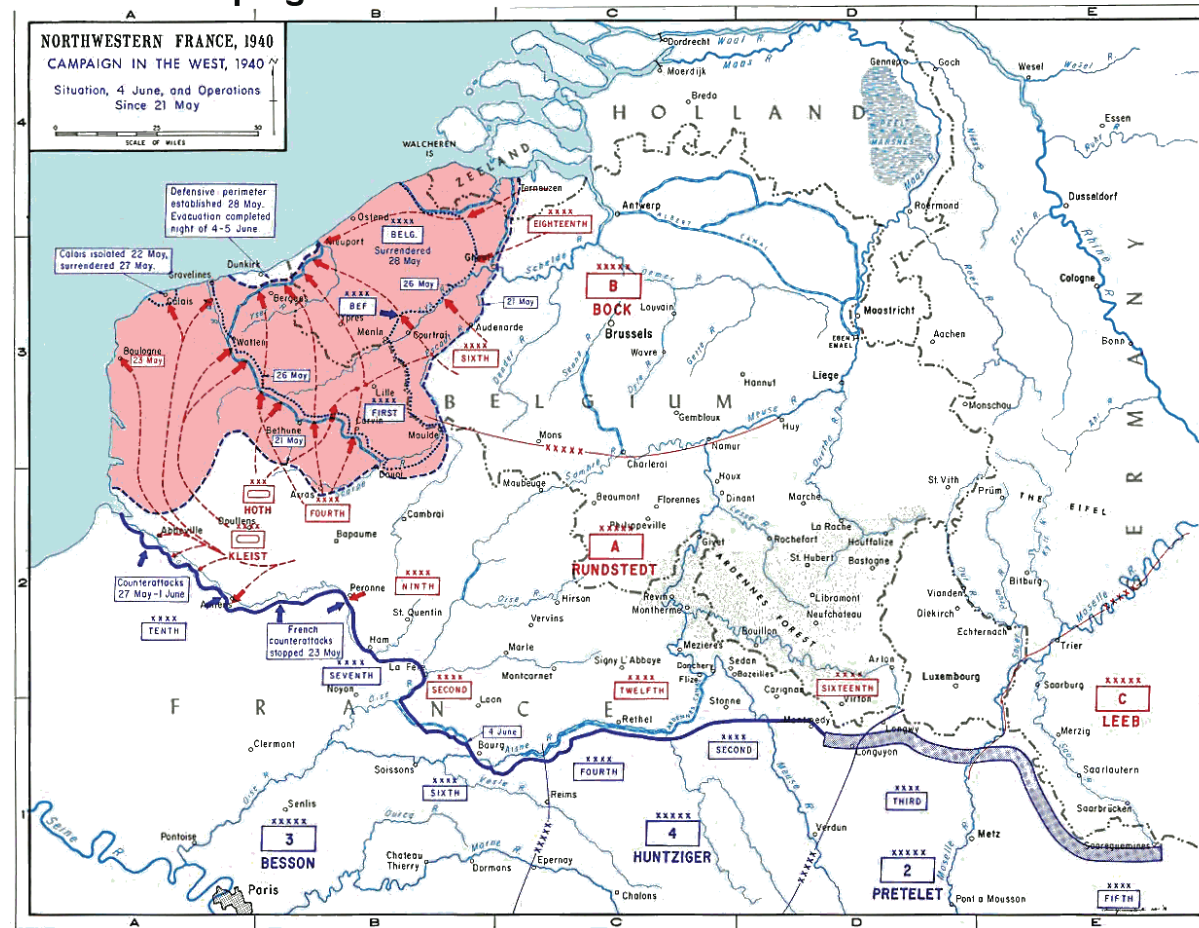


1930/35? Fanny, Benno, Sarah, Chiel, Charlotte & Schlomo

1. The German invasion of France in May, 1940



2. Campaign in the West 1940



THE FIRST ATTEMPT TO ESCAPE

May 10 to May 17 1940

Antwerp to DePanne

The Germans attacked Belgium & France on Friday May 10th, 1940. “Big” Henry (almost 7 years old) remembers waking up early in the morning (5 a.m.?) and hearing bombs being dropped on the city of Antwerp.

We waited a couple of days and then on Sunday May 12 we packed up, piled into taxis and headed for the town of LaPanne, roughly 100 miles away, at the very edge of Belgium, near the coast and near France.

A great many members of the family fled.

The four families; Chumtze, Chiel, Solomon, Tripura (Two maids: Paul’s maid, Big Henry’s maid). Schmiel & Malka Pressberg, Chaim Leb & Gitty Pressberg, Elek & Rosjen Parness, Izi Morgenstein and my paternal Grandmother Bubeshe (78 years old). Also, Benno & Fanny, Marcelle & Pauline, Margulies.

We all traveled to LaPanne where we actually rented an apartment, but it soon became clear that the German Blitzkrieg (lightning fast military warfare) would conquer Belgium and France in record time.

My brother Paul remembers seeing the soldiers go to the front to fight on Monday & Tuesday. On Wednesday and Thursday the flow of soldiers was in the opposite direction, fleeing from the front. On Friday we all left LaPanne.



The families fleeing LaPanne found no vehicles and we all began walking towards the French border, which was roughly five miles away. The scene you must imagine is the one you've seen in movies: roads clogged with thousands & thousands of refugees all fleeing from the fighting at the front. (For a vivid description of the chaos on the roads see Ian McEwan's novel, *Atonement*)

Friday night (May 17, 1940) most of the refugees managed to get to the border between Belgium and France and they slept outdoors in what were probably the ruins of an old castle. Uncle Chiel remembers getting to the border between Belgium & France and being refused entry into France (My brother Paul says there was chaos - no "borders" existed). At the border, Chiel says we were refused entry into France partly because we had Polish passports. Uncle Chiel said "How can you do this. I am a Polish citizen. I am going to France and I will probably be called up to the Polish Army because France & Poland are fighting the Germans and how can I be called up to the Polish Army & fight for France while my family are not there." A day later, after much talking, they were allowed through to France.

At the French border, Uncle Chiel managed to find a vehicle that was able to take his whole family (his wife Charlotte, his daughter Ruth who was sick with the measles, his son Henry & his mother, Bubeshe, who was 77 years old), but there was no room in the cab for Chiel or the Jewish-Czechoslovakian maid. Uncle Chiel paid the driver 10,000 Francs (roughly equal to \$3,300 in 2002) to take them 200 miles south, to Paris, France. We had a relative (Esther De Paris) in Paris, France. Soon it became clear they were not going to be able to make it all the way to Paris, nevertheless, the driver of the vehicle, who left them in the middle of a field, refused to give back any part of the 10,000 francs.

At this point the families split apart. We will follow the four families separately.

Tzipora (31) m. Schmiel Mond
Helen Esther

I had one long interview with Tzipora and Helen. All that is in here "about them" was contributed by them.

(NEEDED: PICTURE OF MOND FAMILY CIRCA 1940)

MOND FAMILY: Schmiel & Tzipora, daughters Helen (6), & Esther (7)

May 17-23(?) 1940

DE PANNE - DUNQUERKE - CALAIS

Tzipora, her husband Schmiel, and Helen & Esther started to walk from Depanne, but because they had two small children they were picked up by a Dutch lorry full of soldiers.

They were taken to Dunkirk (15 miles from Depanne) where they stayed in a Nunnery overnight. The children were small (6 & 7) and they were given small beds to sleep in.

Helen remembers that they stayed in a cellar. She said “The Nuns were praying and the bombs were dropping.” Dunkirk was being heavily shelled as everything was converging on Dunkirk.

They left Dunkirk the next day heading for Calais, which was more than thirty miles away. They walked and Helen remembers being machine-gunned twice by low-flying airplanes, once on the road in Ardres.

One of the times they were machine gunned they were the only people on the road. Another time the planes swooped very low and everyone ran off the road and hid behind a hill. They stayed overnight in a barn in Ardres.

Helen remembers that the barn had a metal roof. After staying there one night they left and went to Calais to try to get on a boat. On the road to Calais Tzipora seems to remember that they met Chiel perhaps at a bus stop. She also remembers walking part of the way with Chiel and that he couldn't walk properly: he had some pain in his shoes.

Tzipora also remembers that he was without Charlotte & that Charlotte left messages everywhere.

4. De Panne to Calais via Dunkerque and Ardres



The next day many members of the family went to the port in Calais** to try to board the boats leaving for England.

Tzipora and Helen remember staying in a cellar overnight the night before they came to the port in Calais. They seem to remember that Uncle Chiel was there with them. When they got to the port Helen remembers that above them, in the air, dogfights were going on.

My aunt Tzipora remembers that first of all they (and others from Antwerp, Belgium) cued up for a big boat, but they all had to leave because the boat couldn't take any civilians; the big boat took only soldiers.

There was a woman there who had been born in England and she went to the captain and said she was British, she wanted to go to England. They directed her to a little merchant navy ship, "a little one, very low" Tzipora said. "We all followed her. She was British. They had to help a British subject," Tzipora said. "We were very lucky. It didn't take very long." In two hours they arrived in Folkestone, England. (For description of Folkestone.... See Paul Morgenstein's narrative).

Tzipora's husband was not allowed to board the boat. They told Tzipora that the men would come on the next boat, but they never came on the next boat.

Many months later Schmiel, and Gity & Chaim Pressberg, tried to cross at the Swiss border. The Swiss guards caught them & would not allow them in. Gity pleaded, cried piteously, & she & Chaim were let in.

They not only denied Schmiel Mond (Tzipora's husband) entrance, they handed him over to the Germans. This was not unusual behaviour for the Swiss. Schmiel Mond perished in the concentration camps.

**Historians focus on the Dunkirk-Dover evacuation. Earlier, a smaller evacuation occurred in Calais-Folkestone. (See Appendix...? History of Calais).

