November 1, 2026

Hello mishpucha and fellow descendants of Henry and Hannah Finger -

I hope you're all well.

It was almost exactly a year ago that I emailed you as Ann and I returned from a two-week Jewish heritage trip to Poland. At the end of that trip, you may remember that we made a last-minute visit to **Kalwaria-Zebrzydowska**, the home of our Finger ancestors, with help of our Polish friend Ewa. (Her mother and grandparents came from Żuromin, the same town as Ann's family. Ewa met Micah online a couple of years earlier while she was looking for Zuromin connections —an interesting story for another time.) One goal of that 2025 trip was to connect with the Taube Center, a Jewish cultural organization in Warsaw, with whom we had already started working to plan a customized trip for our family in 2026.

After the year of preparation, that trip took place this past month, October 2026. Ann and I were joined by our three adult children, Ellie, Adam, and Micah, and Micah's fiancée, Nicole. I'm writing now, having retuned a couple weeks ago, with some highlights from the trip that relate specifically to our Finger ancestry. There are some pictures at the end and a few links embedded into the letter, including a couple pieces near the end of the letter that Micah did following the trip.

It was a moving and serendipitous experience. We visited historical sites across Poland and spent a meaningful day in each of two area: **Żuromin**, where Ann's mother was born, in northern Poland near Warsaw; and **Kalwaria-Zebrzydowska** and nearby **Wadowice**, near Kraków, in the south.

One feature of the Taube Center's program is access to its staff genealogist, Ola, who helps families gather historical information for visits to their ancestral towns. Cousin Jeff Finger (copied, of course) joined a couple of our Zoom planning meetings this past year and got to meet Ola. She drew on his remarkable **Finger family website** and its documents "rescued" years ago from Aunt Molly. For Ann's family, we were also fortunate to have a detailed family history book compiled by her cousins, memories from her mother and aunt, and help from Ewa, who connected us with local resources in Żuromin.

In **Kalwaria-Zebrzydowska**, we once again saw the vacant synagogue, a sizeable building which stands just a block from the town's central square—a reminder of a once-substantial and apparently well-accepted Jewish community. We couldn't go inside again, but this time we noticed on the side door unmistakable evidence of where a mezuzah had once

been (see pictures). Ola had already confirmed that no other physical remnants of the former Jewish community, or Jewish residents, remain in the town nor in nearby Brody, the small contiguous hamlet where Hannah was born and where she and Henry (Hayyim) were married (see the Finger website).

On our last trip, we tried unsuccessfully to find out whether Kalwaria had ever had a Jewish cemetery. This time, we asked Ola, and our guide, Adam, who both inquired and researched the question. They confirmed that no Jewish cemetery was ever established there, although at some point, the Jewish community apparently purchased land for one. The plans seem to have been abandoned because of objections from the Christian community, possibly because of the important Christian pilgrimage site just outside town. The site, btw, is now a UNESCO World Heritage site. As a result, we presume that members of the Kalwaria community were buried in nearby Jewish cemeteries of different towns.

Members of Ann's family left Żuromin in the 1930s, so family memories and even hand-drawn maps from others, preserved the locations of landmarks such as her grandmother's store and the synagogue near the Żuromin town square. These memories have been kept alive not only within the family but also by local non-Jews and by the U.S.-based Żuromin organization, which remains active today. The original buildings are gone, and there were no memorial plaques, but it was gratifying and meaningful to use the hand-drawn map and stand at the site of the Opatowsky family business and across from where the synagogue once stood.

Our visit to Kalwaria felt different. Because the Fingers immigrated decades earlier, near the turn of the twentieth century, we have no records of their specific addresses there. Still, seeing the town and its synagogue with our children made the family's history feel more tangible and brought a sense of nostalgia—and perhaps closure.

The most remarkable moment of serendipity came at the **cemetery in Wadowice**. We learned that this cemetery had somehow survived the Nazis in surprisingly good condition, and hoped to find evidence there of family connections. The Taube Center arranged for us to meet a local cemetery caretaker named Jacek whom neither Ola nor our guide Adam knew. (Jewish visitors here are not common.) We weren't sure what to expect. Jacek turned out to be a remarkable source of information and, unusually, he was Jewish. Though neither religious nor observant, he clearly identified as Jewish, knew Jewish customs and the cemetery well, and could even read the Hebrew on the gravestones—a skill that proved invaluable.

His being Jewish is unusual enough to merit some explanation. Before the war, Poland had more than three million Jews; today, the estimated number is only about 10,000. Most are quite secular, and many have only recently identified their Jewish roots and/or come forward to affiliate in some way with the Jewish community. What this means is that there simply aren't enough Jewish people or resources in Poland to maintain the thousands of remnants of what was once a significant and vibrant society. On both this trip and our last, we repeatedly met dedicated non-Jews who serve as trusted caretakers or guides at important Jewish sites. Their knowledge and commitment, even mastery of Yiddish, were remarkable. Among these dedicated "philosemitic" individuals (a term that was new to us until we visited Poland) were the director of the Kraków JCC, the founder and longtime director of the international Jewish Heritage Festival, and our guides at Auschwitz, the Polin Museum, and Jewish sites in Lancut, Lublin, Warsaw and Kraków — all non-Jews. When we asked why they did this work, each spoke modestly of the importance of preserving history and of the deep connections between Jewish and Polish history and culture. As one put it: "Polish history, Jewish history—it's the same thing. How can we as Poles not care about both?" So, it's in that context that Jacek's being Jewish felt so special.

The **Wadowice cemetery** was remarkably well preserved, with dozens of intact graves. The contrast with Żuromin was stark: there, the Nazis removed every tombstone and used them to build roads. Today, the Żuromin cemetery is a somewhat unkempt fenced field where graves once stood, but only marked by a memorial plaque placed a few years ago by Americans in the Żuromin organization.

We entered Wadowice cemetery and shared some family names with Jacek. When he heard "Seifter," he immediately recognized the name, checked the digital inventory he had on his phone, and led us through the wet grass to a gravestone. It was the grave of "**Resi Seifter**," with an inscription in German as well as Hebrew. (see photos)

This is undoubtedly **Raizel (Rosa, née Landworth) Seifter**, our direct ancestor and the mother of our great-grandmother, Hannah Seifter Finger. For everyone in my generation, that makes her our great-great-grandmother. Although the stone was well preserved, the inscription was difficult to read, and I couldn't get a clear photograph of the lettering. We also didn't have the materials needed to make a rubbing, which might have helped. But Micah and Jacek worked together, drawing on touch, a phone light, and their Hebrew skills, and Micah was able to read, transcribe, and translate the inscription as follows:

> פ״נ פ״נ
> האישה הזקנה החשובה
> הצנועה טובה הפעלה

נדיבת לב מ״ר
ריזל זייפטער
בת הה״ר צבי ז״ל
נפטרה בש״ט ביום כ״ב טבת
תרפא לבק

"Here lies
The elderly, distinguished woman,
The modest, good woman of deeds,
Generous of heart, Mrs. Risel Seifter,
Daughter of the honored Rabbi (Reb) Tzvi, of blessed memory.
She passed away in a good name on the 22nd of Tevet,
5681 (1920–1921)."

Who could have imagined finding her? We paused for a few minutes and took pictures, including one of me holding up her photograph from the website. Then we said Kaddish—perhaps for the first time there in more than a century.

Jacek showed us several other interesting graves and told us about the challenges of maintaining the cemetery. With few visitors and no public funding, its upkeep falls to a very small Jewish community in that area that cares for several nearby cemeteries. He said plainly that they would appreciate any help people might be able to offer, including support for replacing a section of missing fence. I've written to Jacek since returning to ask how those who are interested might help.

I should mention briefly that **Wadowice** is a small but very famous little town because of its most famous native - Pope John Paul II. We had lunch there and took a little walking tour around it to see where the Synagogue had been located, immediately behind the school where the future pope, young Karol Józef Wojtyła, attended. The memorial plaque marking the site of that synagogue quotes JP2 remembering seeing Jewish people going in and out of the synagogue and realizing that "Catholics and Jews were united… by the awareness that they pray to the same God…"

Before we departed the Wadowice cemetery, Jacek checked his phone database again, and told us there was another Seifter grave in **Andrychów**, about a 15-minute drive away - a town with which I was not at all familiar. It was an older grave, he said, and offered to take us there. Of course, we agreed. In Andrychów, we found another Jewish cemetery in surprisingly good condition, with many interesting and older graves. There, Jacek led us to the grave of **Sarah Seifter**. (See photo)

I've sent this information to Ola for her opinion and verification but haven't yet heard back. I believe this to be the person referred to on Jeff's website as "**Sary**," **the first wife of Herschel "Hirsch/Harry" Seifter, our great-great-grandfather**. The gravestone says Sarah Seifter died in 1867. That fits the family information on the website: the children of Sary and Hershel were born before then, while the children of Hershel and his second wife, Raizel—Rosa or Resi, whose grave we found as above in Wadowice, and our great-great-grandmother—were all born after 1868. In those days, it would have been quite natural for a widower with children to remarry quickly, which is consistent with these dates. If this identification is correct, Sary is not our direct ancestor, but she <u>is</u> the mother of Hannah's older half-siblings and an ancestor of many of our relatives—so, mishpucha.

Once again, Micah and Jacek worked together to read, translate, and transcribe the inscription:

> "Here lies Sarah Seifter
> Daughter of the honored Meir (of blessed memory)
> 3 Adar II, 5627"
> [March 10, 1867]
>
> שימי לבכם ונהי שאינה
> ראו ציונה ובקול מר בכינה
> הילילו מכירה כי אספה
> ת׳נ׳צ׳ב׳ה. ואיננה
>
> "Take heed, and let us lament that she is no more.
> Come, see her monument, and weep aloud with bitter cries.
> Wail, you who knew her, for she has been gathered away and is no more.
> May her soul be bound up in the bond of eternal life."

We again said Kaddish. Jacek walked us through the cemetery to look at other graves. One was a woman who died in 1900 at age 115! Jacek noted that, given the small and close Jewish community, undoubtedly this woman knew Sarah Seifter. We also saw another headstone which indicated that this was a person from Kalwaria, confirming our suspicions about of burials from that town.

That's a brief account of our visit to the land of the Fingers and Seifters. There is much more I could tell you about the trip—and even about that one day—but I hope you've enjoyed reading about it and that it may spark your own curiosity about our family's history.

On the plane home, Micah wrote an article for the blog of his organization, **Laasok.** Some of you may remember that he transitioned a few years back from being a congregational rabbi to start Laasok, a virtual beit midrash as he calls it, where he does adult Jewish education, largely online, and also writes and works as a visiting scholar. I say without bias that he is a talented writer and teacher (and of course, as in Lake Wobegon, all of our children are above average! 😉) So perhaps you'll enjoy his blog article, "**Avraham Simkha's Legacy**" as well as the 30-minute "Tikvah Through Text" webinar he did last week, posted on his YouTube page, about our visit and the discovery in Wadowice. It is entitled "**Their Lips Speak From the Grave: Teachings and Memory.**"

Attached are several photos related to our family connections. Please feel free to forward this letter to anyone I may have left out, including your children, other Finger relatives or others who might be interested.

I hope these discoveries help bring our shared family history a little closer and keep the memories of those who came before us alive. I'd love to hear from you all. My best and love to all

Ricky

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Above: Synagogue in Kalwaria-Zebrzydowska, with evidence of prior mezuzah

Far left: Main square of Kalwaria-Zebrzydowska, a block away







Jewish
Cemetery of
Wadowice









Grave of Resi Seifter, Wadowice

Right: Micah and Jacek working to read Hebrew inscription

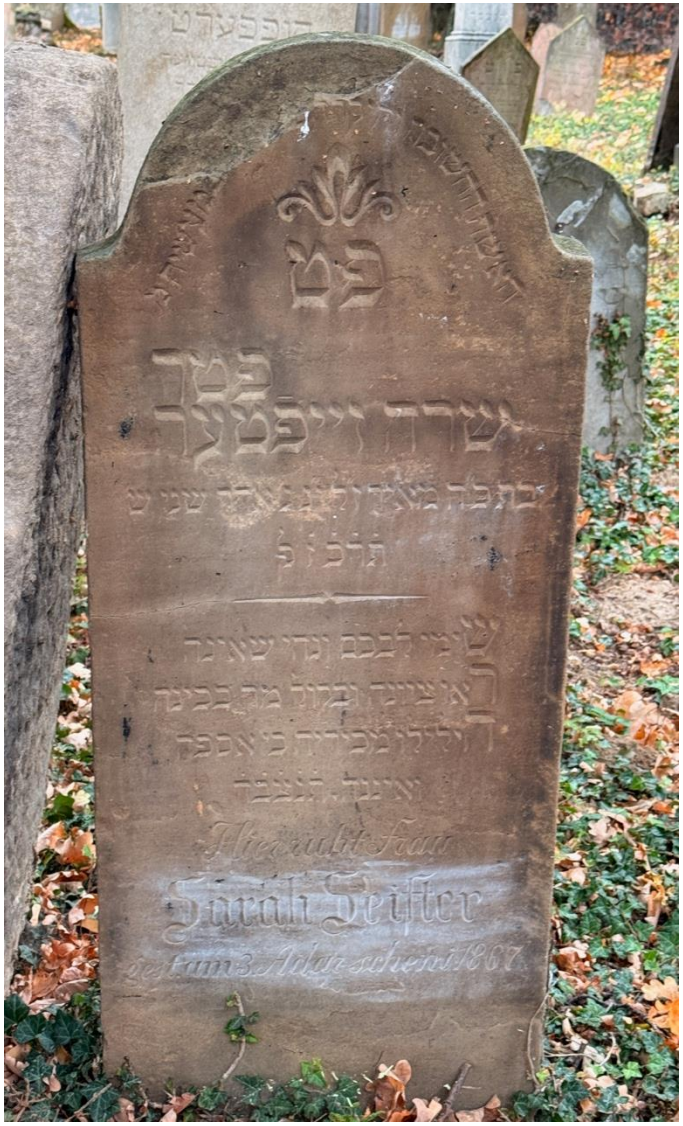


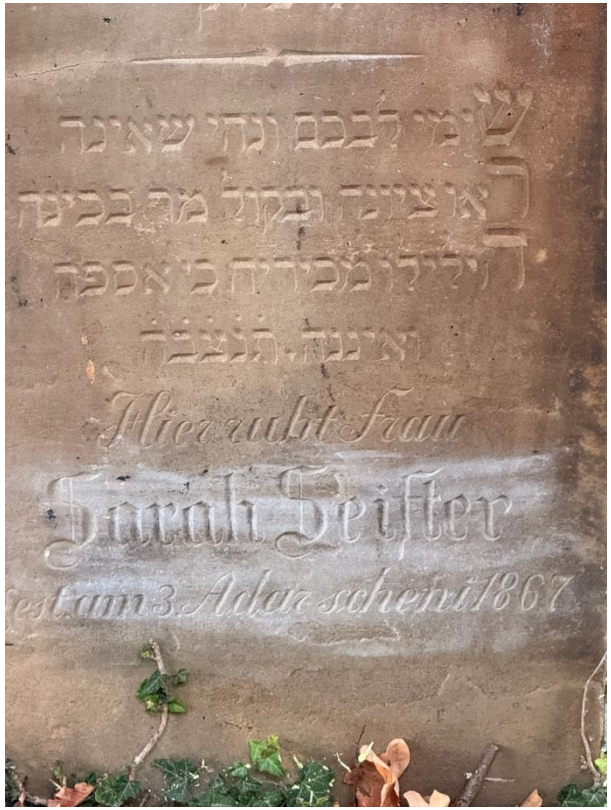


Grave of Resi Seifter, Wadowice



(Right to left at grave of Resi Seifter)
Nicole, Micah, Ann, Rick, Ellie, Adam







Grave of Sarah Seifter, Andrychów

Right: Micah reading inscription



Grave of Sarah Seifter, Andrychów Jewish Cemetery
(Left to right) Nicole, Adam, Rick, Ellie, Micah, Ann



Jacek Proszyk, Director of the management board office
of Jewish Religious Community in Bielsko-Biała

Inscription on Grave of Resi Seifter

האישה הזקנה החשובה
הצנועה טובה הפעלה
נדיבת לב מ״ר
ריזל זייפטער
בת הה״ר צבי ז״ל
נפטרה בש״ט ביום כ״ב טבת
תרפא לבק

Here lies
The elderly, distinguished woman,
the modest, good woman of deeds,
generous of heart, Mrs. Risel Seifter,
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She passed away in a good name on
the 22nd of Tevet, 5681 (1920–1921)

Inscription on Grave of Sarah Seifter

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ראו ציונה ובקול מר בכינה
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ואיננה. ת׳נ׳צ׳ב׳ה

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