

# The Rotter Heritage

by Madeleine Isenberg  
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**Figure 1** Only known photo of the ROTTER Family ca. 1934: L to R, Bernard aka Alexander (Beril Yissachar Dov), Mirel (née BROD), in back, Shmuel/Shmiel, Mottic in front of him, father Aron Jozef, Shalom/Szulim Shachna

I've worked on my own family's genealogy for about 20 years now, but along the way, accumulated information from the Spis Region of Slovakia, derived from reading thousands of tombstones and maintaining spreadsheets of birth, marriage and death records of people who once lived in the same area. I have become sort of a genealogist in reverse – I'm searching for *living* descendants. Invariably when I find someone whose name is similar to someone in my lists, I just have to ask – "Where did your family come from? Did any of them once live in Slovakia?" Mostly the answers are in the negative, but sometimes just initiating the conversation leads to amazing discoveries that I never would have imagined. If I'm able to help someone else, I sometimes feel like the biblical Joseph, who with G-d's help, was able to interpret dreams or solve problems.

So this is what happened with a friend of ours, radiologist Dr. Arnie Rotter, whose ancestors did NOT come from Slovakia. Arnie told me how originally, his father's family came

from Poland and settled in The Hague, the capital of the Netherlands sometime in the 1930s. This was certainly something different. When war reached Holland and they were under the Nazis, Arnie's father and his friend decided they would get away by riding their bicycles into France. They removed their yellow Jewish star armbands (that alone would have meant immediate death if caught by the Nazis) and successfully rode to France. From there, his father reached Switzerland and eventually the USA. But his father always felt very guilty about leaving his family behind. Later, having a family of his own, he preferred to talk with Arnie about his youth in the *shtetl* (town) in Poland and did not discuss his life in The Hague, possibly because of his feelings of guilt. Arnie however wanted to know more.

Thanks to the internet, sometime in 2008, Arnie's sister Sharon, came across a little local newsletter, *Wijk Krant*, for a community in the Hague (dated December 2006), in which the editor had included the account from Franz Kagie, a non-Jewish man, regarding his childhood and reminiscences about Jewish life during WW II. More to the point, it was a memorial to Franz's Jewish childhood friend, Mottic (Marcus) Rotter (1927-1943), Arnie's youngest uncle. It was amazing that a man in his 80s had carried the memories of the Rotter family with him for so many years, and had felt compelled to write about him. But it was written in Dutch<sup>1</sup>, and needed to be translated into English.

The fact that the story existed was a small miracle in itself, but added to that was the rare publication of that newsletter on the internet. The newsletter is just a local paper that is published every two months. But that issue out of a total of 60 in the last 10 years was the only one ever put on the web and made available to the world! At the request of the Rotters, the interviewer and editor of the newsletter, a half-Jewish woman, Jose Mendels, provided a rough translation into English. After reading it, I felt I could improve the story and even added some explanatory notes.

#### **JEWISH FAMILIES OF SCHELDESTRAAT, THE HAGUE, PERIOD 1937-1945**

##### ***Dedicated to the memory of Mottic (Markus) Rotter, 1927-1943***

It's 1937, and we're in The Hague's River quarter, known as a neighbourhood with lots of Jewish people as well as Polish and Dutch, Orthodox and non-Orthodox; also known, of course, as Ward 7, the Red-Light district. The threat of war is approaching rapidly. The fear of Nazi Germany is felt throughout the entire neighbourhood, obviously most among the Jewish people. The crisis is reaching its peak. Poverty, unemployment and hunger are everywhere. The welfare distribution for an unemployed married man with two children is 12.40<sup>2</sup> Guilders net a week. Entire streets of rental apartments are up for rent and empty. Apartment owners offer special discounts; their apartments are fully painted and wallpapered and rent-free for several months.

No. 44 Scheldestraat was the home of the miserably poor Polish shoemaker, Mr. (Aron Yosef ) Rotter, who walked with a limp, his wife and their three sons (Markus, Szulim (Shalom) and Samuel (Shmiel)). The fourth son Alexander<sup>3</sup> was able to flee in time to an uncle in the US, and was working

there as an apprentice in the fur trade. Their youngest son Mottic (Markus) was still attending the Jewish school on Bezemstraat. Mottic and I, were best friends even though I was a Christian; discrimination did not exist. We were both about 13 years old. After school we boys would play football (soccer) in the streets, or ping pong and card games in the back room at the Rotters' home. Shmiel, the eldest son, also used this room as his fur workshop. ...

Despite all the misery, the Sabbath was rather festive, if modest. After sunset on Fridays (Sabbath night) the whole Rotter family would gather at the table, and I would be there too. The living room was furnished very simply and consisted only of a dining room table and some chairs, a coal burning stove and a worn-out radio. Nevertheless, it was cosy. The Sabbath service was always led by father Rotter. He would be at the right-hand side of the chimney, next to the Jewish candlesticks, and (for about 15 minutes) he would murmur Hebrew prayers and drink a small glass of wine. After the prayers the simple meal of soup and *latkes* (a potato dish) could begin.

Afterwards, we boys would play a game of ping-pong or cards with some of our friends. Some of the friends I remember are: Max van Vriesland and Harrie Davidson.

Early morning on Saturdays (Sabbath day) the Jewish men, boys and I would gather at the house of the Rotter family; from there we would start our leisurely walk to the synagogue on Wagenstraat. Some other men and boys would join us on the way through Pletterijstraat, Spui and Veerkade. Upon arrival at the synagogue they gave me a *yarmulke* (skullcap) and I would enter in with the rest. Since Jewish people weren't allowed to touch money at the Sabbath, I had to come along to hand street musicians a dime or a quarter on the way to the synagogue<sup>4</sup>. After the service, the procession of men would take the same route back home.

On the Sabbath, Orthodox Jewish people also were not allowed to handle gas or electric instruments. I would run from one house to another to help with the gas and the lights. I would receive small gifts in thanks for my help. From the Alters (a textile salesman) at No. 40, I sometimes got a small piece of unsellable clothing, and yet I'd be happy with that. Recognizing a particular loud call from someone from in the neighbourhood I knew exactly where to go to assist with the gas or the electricity.

In the summer of 1942 I had to check on the Wolf family at no. 131 to see whether they were still alive. No one answered the door, but I knew how to get in. The house on the first floor was totally deserted, it was very clean and tidy, the beds were made and there were no dirty dishes in the kitchen. After the war in 1953, I met the two daughters by accident in The Hague; they had fled to Portugal with their parents in 1942 and had survived the war. Both had married in the meantime and lived in Canada and England, respectively.

There was an immense solidarity among the Jewish people. Everybody tried to help one another whenever possible. One Sabbath night the Alters asked me to check what food the Abrahamsen family with seven children at No. 119, had available. Obviously, Mr. Abrahamsen knew why I was visiting and he told me they didn't have a lot to eat. When I reported back to the Alters they gave me soup and other food for the family, which I had to deliver secretly yet in such a way that everyone could see it.

There was a small auxiliary synagogue on the corner of Zaanstraat and Dommelstraat where I also did a bit of cleaning on Fridays. I never knew what the purpose of that synagogue was.

Bram de Leeuw, brother of the butcher at No. 34, worked as a coal hauler at Fransen and Van Leeuwen coal business on Dommelstraat. He was hard working and a very brave lad. One day in 1942 while loading coal onto a truck, he got into a fist-fight with a couple of Germans and delivered a few solid blows. What followed was to be expected: we never saw brave Bram again.

In July 1943 all the Jewish people were told to bring a few personal belongings and await transport in front of their apartments. Pick-up trucks with open beds came and parked on the right-hand side in Scheldestraat. The Christian people were not allowed outside. The blacksmith and I watched it all from behind the curtains in the living room above the smithy on Dommelstraat. From an angle we could see the Rotters' house. The Germans forced the Jewish people to get into the open trucks: women, men and the youngsters. The Jewish people helped each other get onto the trucks. Father Rotter, elderly, handicapped, and without his cane, was helped up by his sons. What a disgraceful scene it was to watch how thugs deported our neighbours and friends, in a criminal manner, to an unknown destination. Everyone thought they were being deported to some labor camp somewhere in Germany.

On the day before the arrest Mottic and I had sewn some foodstuffs and candies into the lining of Mottic's jacket. We boys also thought the Jewish people were deported to a labor camp somewhere in Germany. The two of us put on a brave face, but we had a hard time saying our goodbyes. We shook hands; we couldn't speak and there were no words to express our feelings anyway. The atmosphere was very sad, but we put up a brave front. (Four days later Mottic would lose his life in the gas chambers.)

Earlier, father Rotter, handicapped as he was, had given me his silver handled, black wood cane for him to look after until he returned. Until this day, I still have that cane. Weeks earlier Smiel's fur working machine, models and financial records had been stored in the blacksmith's workshop on Dommelstraat.

With the exception of Smiel Rotter (born 1921), who survived the concentration camps, all the Jews from Scheldestraat were killed (gassed). Both Mottic and his mother were murdered in Sobibor on July 16<sup>th</sup>, 1943, only four days after their arrest. After the war, in August 1945, Smiel returned from Auschwitz, a living skeleton. He was very weak when he came to the blacksmith to pick up his belongings, so at his request the blacksmith took his things to an address on Van Limburg Stirumstraat on a handcart. Soon after, Smiel left for the United States where he joined his brother Alexander.

Written, September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2004, revised on April 27<sup>th</sup>, 2006.

Franz Kagie (with his contact information)

Kagie also added an appendix listing the Jewish Families he had known on Scheldestraat and what happened to them. For the sake of this article, only those related to Arnie are listed below, with some additional information from Arnie, as he knew then.

ROTTER Aron Jozef (b. 1898) Scheldestraat 44, Shoemaker, died in Auschwitz, September 24 1943, (24 Elul)

His wife Myrel BROD (b. 1898) died in Sobibor , July 16 1943 (13 Tammuz)

Son Markus (b. 1927) died in Sobibor, July 16 1943 (13 Tammuz)

Son Szulim (Sholom) (b. 1926) died in Auschwitz, September 24 1943 (24 Elul)

Son Samuel (b. 1921) Survived Auschwitz, and went to America at the end of 1945

Son Alexander (b. 1923 ), went to Switzerland during the war and came to the USA in 1949-50

With the discovery in 2008 of this gem of a family history, and Jewish life pre World War II<sup>5</sup>, as seen by an outsider, communication by e-mail and telephone began to fly among the cousins. They wondered if this elderly man were still alive and if so, how could they contact him?

From Israel, Arnie's cousin Joshua Salzberg<sup>6</sup> contacted the Chabad rabbi, Rabbi Shmuel Katzman<sup>7</sup> in The Hague, who helped to locate Mr. Kagie. Joshua tried to contact Mr. Kagie directly by phone in August 2008. But since they could not understand each other's languages, the Chabad Rabbi suggested that the editor Jose Mendels could help and was asked to participate in a conference call to help translate. The family was intrigued to learn of the existence of the silver handled cane – something that the hand of the grandfather they never knew had held and used for so many years. Was the cane still somewhere to be found? How would it feel for the hands of this generation to hold and contemplate the ancestor who used to rely so heavily on it?

The newsletter also provided some other surprises that the family were heretofore never aware of: For instance, the reference to "Alexander." Arnie commented,

"Alexander might be a pseudo-name for Bernard (Berle-Yissachar Dov) Rotter – name probably changed and the fictitious story of his going to America created to protect him from the Germans. (I never heard of this name in my interviews with my father about his childhood.) In fact, Bernard Rotter removed his yellow star and rode by bicycle thru Nazi occupied Holland and Belgium to a cousin in a farm in France from where he was smuggled into Switzerland where he spent most of the war. Aside for this detail, the remainder of the basic facts sounds correct."

As for the article itself, Arnie said,

"It is a pity that neither my father nor uncle Shmuel got to see this article before their passing. " Also it is noteworthy that "old" man Rotter, Aron Jozef and Myrel (Yiddish for Miriam) were only

45 when he was murdered in Auschwitz. That he had a limp was never mentioned to me so it could be that he had been injured or had developed arthritis.”

In another difficult phone call with Mr. Kagie, they learned more about the family. As for the cane, he didn't have it in hand, because it was in the house of his ex-wife who was on vacation. When she returned he would retrieve it and mail it to them right away and indeed he mailed the cane to Boruch Salzberg in Israel, who brought it to the wedding of Yael Rotter in November 2008, in Israel. Boruch, the great grandson of Aron Yozef Rotter, with great respect and honor, handed the cane to the father of the bride, Arnie Rotter. The cane was in frail condition and the handle came off. As an inanimate object, it didn't need Arnie's medical knowledge and expertise in radiology to determine where or how it was broken. They patched it together temporarily as best they could, but knew it would need some tender loving care to make it whole.

Arnie brought the cane to New York where he showed it to his cousins Claire and Margie<sup>8</sup> and shared its provenance with them, at least as far back as their common grandfather, Aharon Yozef. Where and when it was made or how it was acquired are unanswerable questions. Eventually, Arnie brought it back to Los Angeles. With his wife's knowledge of skilled craftsmen, it was restored to a useable state – but with a hope that no one should ever need to use it at all. Arnie ordered a special case to contain it.

Arnie became the curator of the cane – an heirloom and treasure -- with more personal than monetary value. On any Shabbat meal, Friday night dinner or Shabbat lunch, as those seated around the table sing *zmirot* (Sabbath songs) with a joyous heart, Arnie gives a little wink to the cane, as if to say – *Zeidy (Grandpa), we're carrying on your legacy, of Shabbat warmth, hospitality, and zmirot. All is not lost.*

But this was not the end of the story. Arnie also e-mailed me the last letter written by his namesake-grandfather Aharon Yosef Rotter, to Bertie (Arnie's father, known as Bernard or Beril, or as Arnie learned from Franz Hagie's account -- *Alexander*). It was written one week



**Figure 2 Boruch Salzberg hands the cane of their grandfather, Aharon Yosef Rotter, to Arnie Rotter**

after their arrest on Sept 19, 1943 from Westerbork, the Dutch transit camp on the way to Auschwitz. It is written in German, rather than Dutch, and was originally translated into English by Yacov Blum, but I made some changes according to my own interpretation:

Westerbork. 19. 9. '43.

Lieber Bertie,

Du wirst froh sein, wieder was von uns zu hören. Ich, Schmiel und Hulim sind hier. Tante und Mottik sind nach Onkel David abgereist. Wie geht es dir. Bei uns ist alles in Ordnung. Wir sind G.s.D. alle gesund. Hast schon mit Onkel Harry Verbindung gehabt. Es wundert uns sehr dass wir das Certificaatnummer von Erets noch nicht empfangen haben. Ich hoffe dass du dich wieder dafür wirst interessieren. Von Beppie haben wir gehört, dass du das Paket empfangen hast. Wir waren sehr froh, das kannst du dir vorstellen. Wir sind hier mit viele Bekannte. Turin, Sack, Bakar, Frojim, Findling, Sonnenberg und viele ander. Auch die Frau Swarz ist hier. Von Jean haben wir nichts gehört. Also lieber Bertie ich hoffe dass du bald wirst antworten und auch das Certificaatnummer nicht vergisst. Sei gegrüsst und gehüsst von uns alle. Gib die Grüsse an Onkel Harry.

Darius

A. J. Rotter

Figure 3 Last Letter From Aharon Rotter from Westerbork

Westerbrook, 19. 9. '43

Dear Bertie,

You will be happy to hear from us again. I, Schmiel, and Szulim are here. Auntie ("Tante") and Mottik have gone to Uncle David. How are you? Everything's fine by us. We are thank God all healthy. Have you already been in contact with Uncle Harry? It's very surprising to us that we still haven't received the certificate number ("certificaatnummer") from Erets[?]. I hope that you'll still be interested in [doing?] that. We've heard from Beppie that you received the package. We were very happy, as you can imagine. We're here with many acquaintances. Turin, Sack, Oskar, Frojim, Findling, Sonnenberg and many others. Mrs. Swarz is also here. From Jean we

*haven't heard anything. So, dear Bertie, I hope that you will answer soon, and also won't forget the certificate number. Regards and kisses from all of us. Also send regards to Uncle Harry.*

???

*A J Rotter*

Arnie surmised that the “certificatnumber” was a visa number to emigrate to allow his family to get away from the Nazis. Presumably Erets, is Israel, but it was not a state at that time. It is unlikely that a Polish Jew knew proper German so most likely it had been written by someone for him. The Nazis must have insisted that all correspondence be in German so that they could censor it. The “Uncle Harry in America” mentioned in the letter indeed was the relative who after the war, sponsored Arnie’s father to come to the US. Also, an observant Jew would have had some minimal Hebrew in the letter, like the letters, **ד"סב** in the top right hand corner. This was and is the way all correspondence would have been written.

Arnie did not know who any of the people mentioned in the note were. According to the dates provided by Kagie, Aharon Yosef was martyred just five days after the date of this letter. By the time Bertie (Beril) received it, his family had all been killed.

By this time, this family’s story had become more intriguing and I wanted to see how I could further help. After completing the portion above, I asked Arnie if he had any more information about his family: Where they came from in Poland and if he had any photos? Arnie e-mailed the only known family photo.

As to where they came from, before reaching The Hague, The Netherlands, Arnie sent the following:

Bernard (Yissachar Dov) born in Grodzisko  
Aharon Yosef (owner of cane, born Dynow/Brzozow or Dinev)  
Michoel (born Dobromyl near Przemashil<sup>9</sup>, Galizia - now Ukraine)  
Myril BROD, b. Grodzisko

Knowing that Polish spelling and pronunciation of words are a little strange for Americans, I decided to see what I might find on-line. Probably the best site for anyone with Jewish ancestry in Poland, is JewishGen’s Jewish Records Indexing-Poland, (JRI\_Poland) <http://www.jewishgen.org/jri-pl/jriplweb.htm>. “Filling in the blanks” with a family name and town, in a few tries some ROTTER people appeared in Dobrimil, and were e-mailed to Arnie. I noted:



Dobromil PSA B1880 D1889,97													
Lwów Województwa / Ukraine (records in Fond 1234 in Rzeszów Archive) Located at 49°34' 22"47" Last updated April 2009													
Surname	Givenname	Year	Type	Akt	Event	Signature	Sex	Comments					
ROTTER	Leib	1889	D	20	1889	16	M						

Sambor PSA AGAD Births 1862-1905, Deaths 1868-1903																			
Marriages 1877-1905																			
Lwów Województwa / Ukraine (records in Fond 300 in AGAD Archive) Located at 49°31' 23"12" Last updated May 2007																			
Surname	Givenname	Year	Type	Akt	Page	Event	Signature	Age	Sex	Father	Fathersurn	Fathertown	Mother	Mothersurn	Mothers town	Town	Spouse	Spousesurn	Comments
	Sara	1885	B	233			1089		F	Jakob Ber	MUGER v KAUFMANN v BERMAN		Mindel	ROTTER	Dobromil				
ROTTER	Jütte	1889	D	60			1101	53y.	F							Dobromil	Schnil	ROTTER	
MUGER/KAUFMANN/BERMANN	Jakob Ber	1885	M	30			1097	25 y.	M				Sara	MUGER					
ROTTER	Mindel	1885	M	30			1097	24 y., 8 m.	F	Sammuel	ROTTER		lte	ROTTER		Dobromil			

**Figure 4 Results of Search for ROTTER on JRI-Poland**

*“Also, in checking Jewish Records Indexing -- Poland, I did not find your great-grandfather or grandfather, but perhaps some other relatives. Note that Shmuel ROTTER was married to Itte/Jutte.”*

As part of JewishGen, there is also an invaluable resource called Family Finder, <http://www.jewishgen.org/jgff/>. Here’s where people can post the family names together with the towns they are looking for. Other people checking there can then compare and see if anyone else is looking for the same people. Sometimes, the researcher provides his/her name and/or address and telephone. Sometimes, it only has the researcher’s identification number. By clicking on that number, you can send that person a message. Putting in the name ROTTER with that exact spelling, 31 researchers popped-up. Scrolling down, exactly one researcher (with an ID number only) was looking for ROTTER who came from either Dobromil or Dynow. It said that the last time this person had checked this list was February 2012. There was no name, and since it was still February, I wondered if this was possibly even someone like Arnie himself, who was checking, but decided to try and send an e-mail on Arnie’s behalf anyway. There was no knowing what this would produce, but it seemed promising.

Finally, since this whole story is about those who were martyred and the very few who survived, checking the Yad Vashem Archives was a must to see if there was anything for an Aron ROTTER. Yad Vashem’s Archives are problematic for several reasons: Anyone can submit a so-called “Page of Testimony” and provide as much information as they know or have. Sometimes it is actually very frustratingly minimal. There are often multiple pages of testimony, submitted by several family members or friends for the same person. Not all of the information matches; sometimes there are grievous errors. Some forms are filled out in Hebrew (or other languages) and the English transcription may have errors or not provide as much information as on the original. So, Yes, there were records of interest.

One was for Myrl BROD ROTTER, who was born in 8 June 1888, in Grodzisko, Poland. Since Arnie had said his grandparents were both 45 when they were taken away., was that year an error? It seems that 1888 was the correct year and she was actually 55, 10 years senior to her husband! There were three records for Aron Josef, who was born 16 December 1898 in Dynow. One of these seems to be correct while another "relative" put in a page for an Aron ROTTER, but perhaps by mistake put in Yeta as his wife (rather than his mother)! But this record also indicated three children, Edel, Henik, and Frieda! And of course, there was one for Markus/Mottik, also born in Grodzisko. One might then have to assume that the family lived in their mother's home town, before going to The Hague. Or, perhaps mother went there to be with her family at the time of birth. Perhaps someone else can confirm that.

While I was puttering around, Arnie's sister Sharon made her own discovery, probably concurrent with my findings! Here's her e-mail that she copied to me as well:

*Arnie and all,*

*Many thanks to Madeleine Isenberg for the time and effort she obviously dedicated to arranging the information we have. Slowly but surely the details of our family are being fleshed out and developed into a realistic story.*

*Now if everyone is sitting down, I thought I'd let you know what the latest little search online has dug up. Perhaps it will explain something that was mentioned in the letter from Aron Josef that Arnie had translated.*

*I did another quick search on Aron Josef Rotter on Google, and lo and behold, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum has online a digital photo of a certificate with the photos of our grandparents, Aron Josef and Myrel Rotter!*

*I'm including the link ...*

*<http://digitalassets.ushmm.org/photoarchives/detail.aspx?id=1169369&search=BROD&index=18>*

*It seems that a Salvadoran citizenship certificate was issued to them and a copy sent to Westerbork, too late to help them, sadly, by George Mandel-Mantello. He worked out of Switzerland, opening an office in conjunction with a number of Jewish organizations, attempting to save as many Jews as possible. This certificate was probably in the batch of 1000 originals that were donated to the museum by Mandel-Mantello's son.*

*I wonder if this was the certificate that was referred to in the letter, and even further, if our father Berel was involved in Switzerland in arranging the papers with Mandel-Mantello's office (perhaps through some Jewish organization). Arnie, do you have any details about the date that Daddy arrived in Switzerland and where he lived? We know that he stayed in a hotel-like refugee camp with many other Jews (including the Satmar Rav, at one point) so maybe he was able to speak to people who had connections to the Salvadoran operation.*

*The fact that we can find such incredibly pertinent and exciting information about them from a simple online search makes me wonder how much more we can discover with a little extra effort.*

*Love to all,*

Sharon and family

Here's the "unauthorized Salvadoran Certificate" for the Rotters: Aaron Josef, Myrz (sic), Szulin, and Markus. While this is for the Central American country of El Salvador, it is in French, probably since it was written in Geneva, Switzerland. How this document came to exist is a fascinating story in itself and can be read at the end of the aforementioned link.

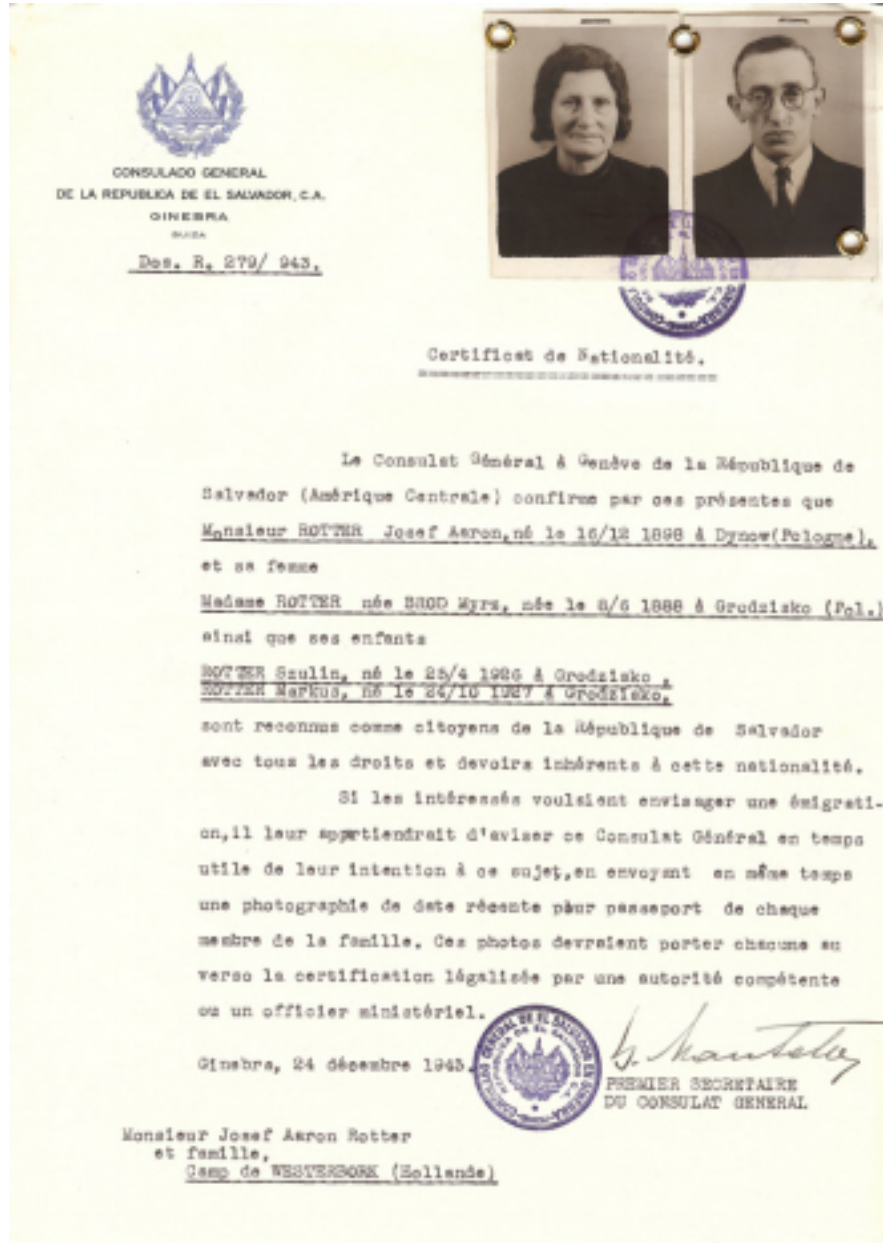


Figure 5 "Unauthorized Salvadorian Certificate"

This document was truly an amazing find and clarified the earlier "certificatsnummer" that had so puzzled Arnie and the others, as well as providing the last photos of Myrl and Aron Jozef.

What still remained for this fact-filled day, was to hear back from the “unknown” researcher. There was no response on Sunday, and I was beginning to feel disappointed, and maybe just a bit impatient.

However, Monday morning had more surprises, and I e-mailed the “ROTTER *mispocha* (family)” the following:

*Hello everyone,*

*According to my cousin, the Chief Rabbi, Lord Jonathan Sacks, when I asked him what he thinks about "coincidence vs. beshert (predestined)" his immediate response to me was, "There's no such thing as coincidence; it's all beshert!" So why am I telling you this?*

*Once in a while I check things out on e-bay. A couple of weeks ago, I was looking to see what they had in the way of Yizkor Books. Do you know what these are? FYI, after WW II, people prepared books to commemorate the families and shtetls/towns they once lived in. These books are often compilation of family histories and what life was once like in those towns. Anyway, this morning I saw this. A week ago it would have meant absolutely nothing to me, but there it was on the first page of the listing of Yizkor Books. Now it would certainly mean something to all of you!*

*"KAMP VAN HOOP EN WANHOOP". WESTERBORK CAMP. 170 RUDOLF WERNER BRESLAUER(1904-1944) PHOTOGRAPHS & EVIDENCE OF SURVIVORS. Edited by Willy Lindwer YIZKOR Book , published by Uitgeverij Balans Holland 1990. The book is written Dutch and contains 271 pages.6.5"x9.5". ...with the following information:*

*The camp of Westerbork was situated about 15 km from the village of Westerbork. This camp had been opened by the Dutch authorities during the summer 1939 in order to receive the Jewish refugees coming from Germany. The first refugees arrived in Westerbork on October 9th, 1939. When the German army invaded Holland, there were 750 refugees in the camp.*

*On July 1st, 1942, the German authorities took control of the camp. Westerbork became officially a "transit camp" (Durchgangslager Westerbork). On July 14th, 1942, all the Jews were examined by the SS in order to determine who was able to work or not. The first train arrived on July 15th and left the camp on July 16th with 1,135 of the first selected Jews. By the end of the month, nearly 6,000 Dutch Jews had, in fact reached Auschwitz, where the majority were gassed. The destination of this train (and all the following trains) was Auschwitz. In the beginning, the transfers were done at the station of Hooghalen. In November 1942, and after new rail lines had been constructed, the trains arrived directly into the camp. More than 103.000 Jews were transferred from Westerbork to Auschwitz or Sobibor (an extermination camp in Poland)*

*So what do you think? Coincidence or beshert?*

*Thanks,*

*Madeleine*

But that was not all. The day still had another surprise, perhaps the best of all! It was a response from the "unknown researcher" who now had a name. The following is his e-mail, as written:

- From : Chaim Cohen, (researcher code XXXXX)  
- To : Madeleine Isenberg, (researcher code XXXXX)  
- Subject : The JewishGen Family Finder: ROTTER

=====

*thank you for helping me find my relatives. my name is chaim mechel cohen. I am named "mechel" after my great-grand father mechel rotter of dynow. my mother roiza cohen is a daughter of Moshe Berger and Baila Nesha a daughter of Yechiel Mechel Rotter and his wife Perl Tauba. Thei had a son Aharon Yosef married to family Brod of Grodzisk and had two children Shmiel and Berl. I would like to know their children and grandchildren. They also had a daughter Esther Adler who had 3 Daughters. I would like to know about them too. The Zaida Mechel was born in Dobromil to his father shmuel and his mother Yitta. He married Perl Tauba daughter of Shulim Shachna and Yenta Berger.*

Bingo!

I immediately sent him a response and copied Arnie, so that Arnie could forward to all involved.

*Chaim,  
I have been helping Arnie write about his family these past few days, and many members of his family have been delighted to see the results. I know think they will be MORE than delighted to hear about you as well.*

*Arnie,  
Please meet your "cousin" Chaim, and I'll let you pass this on to your mishpocha!  
Thanks for responding, Chaim!  
Enjoy!  
Madeleine Isenberg*

Arnie did in fact communicate with Chaim as quickly as possible and discovered that Arnie's parents had even attended Chaim's wedding. On February 15<sup>th</sup> 2012, Arnie wrote:

*"After speaking with my cousin Chaim Mechel Cohen I now know that my full Hebrew name (paternal side) is: Aharon Yosef ben Yissachar Dov ben Aharon Yosef ben Yechiel Mechel ben Shmuel"*

For whatever the reason, Arnie and cousins knew nothing about this person so now the connection has been re-established and I consider my intervention complete.

Since I was the person who egged on Arnie in the first place to create such a family history, I felt responsible and decided I would help him put this together. I had no idea where it would lead, but I am glad it clarified some of the mysteries for the Rotter descendents. It was gratifying to me that I could use my acquired skills and patience to help bring another family closer. It's what we genealogists do!

## ***Epilogue:***

As a final postscript to this long saga, Joshua Salzberg referred to earlier as Arnie's cousin, sent an e-mail as I was writing this article. It seems he too, searched the US Holocaust Museum, and found yet another "unauthorized Salvadoran Certificate" – this time for Shmuel (Shmiel). Again it did not get there in time, but Shmiel did survive Auschwitz.

## ***Notes:***

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<sup>1</sup> In early 2012, the original Dutch version was on-line here:

[http://www.bewonershaegschhof.nl/component/option,com\\_docman/task,doc\\_view/gid,2/Itemid,37/](http://www.bewonershaegschhof.nl/component/option,com_docman/task,doc_view/gid,2/Itemid,37/) but currently cannot be found there.

<sup>2</sup> At that time a guilder was worth about \$0.25.

<sup>3</sup> According to Arnie, this was not true, at least not before WW II. After reaching France, he was smuggled across the border into Switzerland and stayed in a DP camp in Switzerland until after the war. He eventually immigrated to the USA in 1950-1. It was perhaps convenient for the family and others to believe that he had reached America, too far away from the Nazis to try and find him.

<sup>4</sup> It is assumed that it was customary to tip street musicians some small amount. Not to do so, might have caused bad feelings toward Jews who could not explain why they couldn't participate on the Sabbath.

<sup>5</sup> For more about life in this period, see <http://www.jhm.nl/culture-and-history/the-netherlands/zuid-holland/den-haag>

<sup>6</sup> The Salzberg family are descendent from Shmiel (Shmuel) ROTTER's daughter Claire.

<sup>7</sup> Link to Chabad website : [http://www.chabad.org/centers/default\\_cdo/aid/118317/jewish/Chabad-at-the-Hague.htm](http://www.chabad.org/centers/default_cdo/aid/118317/jewish/Chabad-at-the-Hague.htm)

<sup>8</sup> Claire and Margie are the two daughters of Shmiel (Shmuel) ROTTER. Claire married Tuvia SALZBERG; Margie married Danny Shabbat.

<sup>9</sup> Przemysl