

# Finding My Cousin Zara Smushkovich

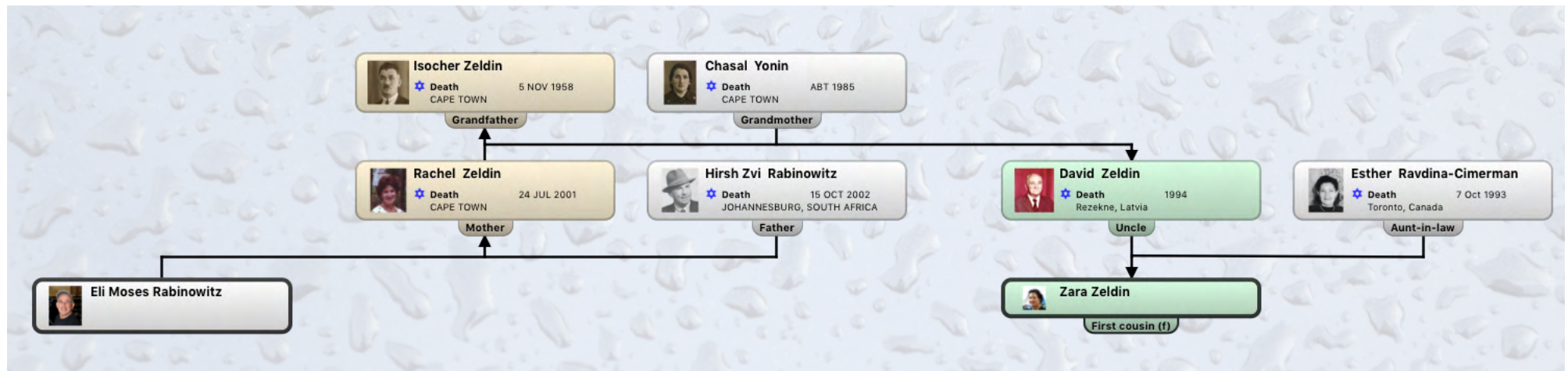
By Eli Rabinowitz

October 2016

This is how my story unfolds, reaching a climax a week before Jewish New Year 5777



Zara Zeldin Smushkovich



I met my first cousin Zara, known to us as Sofka, in late 1975 on Kibbutz Tzora in Israel. As far as I can recall, this was our only meeting.

**Zara had arrived with her family in 1973 from Riga, Latvia.**



**I took this photo of Meir, Zara, Ossie, Bessie, Uncle Isaac, Aunty Luba, Alla, Aunty Esther, and my mother Rachel.**



Zara's father David Zeldin and my mother, Rachel were siblings.





**Aunty Esther, David Zeldin's wife, her daughter Zara and grand daughter Alla.**

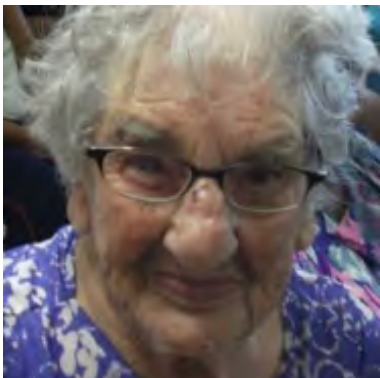


**My grandparents Socher and Chasa Zeldin  
and their six daughters left Riga for South Africa between 1927 to 1937.**





**Five of the sisters Yetta, Annie, Rachel (my mother), Guta and Luba (taken in the 1970s)**



**Chana, the youngest sister**



**My grandparents, Isocher and Chasa, the married Zeldin sisters and their husbands**



**11 of the 15 grandchildren all born in Cape Tow**



**A typical family gathering in the 50s.**

**Two brothers, Moisey and David were left behind in Latvia.**



**Uncle Moisey, the eldest, died in the Holocaust, around 1941 while his younger brother David, pictured here, joined the Soviet Army and survived.**



David's children, Mendel and Zara, spent the war years with their mother Esther in a refugee camp near Tashkent in Uzbekistan.



Documents from the Latvian archives showing their refugee status in Uzbekistan.





**Uncle David, his wife Esther and their daughter Zara at her wedding in Riga in August 1957.**



**This photo: Aunty Luba, Alla, my mom Rachel, cousin Solly, Zara, Esther, Sorrel and her son Gil in late 70s in Israel.**

**Zara and her family left Israel for Canada in 1984.**

**In 2001, thanks to Saul Issroff, London based president of South African SIG, I made contact for the first time with Ferenc Koszeg, my Zeldin second cousin in Budapest, Hungary.**

**The article below describes the amazing way we connected!**

# 'Web' unites Zeldin cousins across three continents

as reported to Irma Chait

On 24 July this year former Capetonian Eli Rabinowitz, who now lives in Perth, noted an item on the South African Jewish Genealogy web page, which is edited by Dr Saul Issroff in London. It related to his paternal grandfather, Rev NM Rabinowitz, who was the chazan at the Constitution Street and Vredehoek shuls for about 30 years. He duly contacted Saul to tell him that this was his grandfather, and at the same time mentioned that his maternal grandfather was Issocher Zeldin.

"Twenty days later," Eli says, "I received an e-mail from a Ferenc Koszeg in Hungary. He wrote that he was going to the Durban conference on Racism and was looking for family in South Africa. His grandmother, Chassia Zeldin's brother had left Riga for South Africa after the first World War and contact with that branch of the family had subsequently been lost. The brother's name was Socher Zeldin.

"He said that through a friend he had made contact with Dr Saul Issroff on 11 August ( just 15 days after I had contacted him) and Saul had told him of an Issocher Zeldin and given him my details."

Socher proved indeed to be Ferenc's grand uncle, Issocher Zeldin.

Socher and his wife, Chasal, had several children. Four of the daughters were the mothers of Eli and his Cape Town 'Zeldin' cousins Solly Berger, Phyllis Jowell, Jerry Zinn and Jeanette Marcus (mother Anne Zinn), and Sonia

Bloch. A fifth sister is Yetta Lindenbaum, who lives in Sea Point.

A strong line of e-mail communication was established between the (now) Australian and Hungarian relatives and with much excitement, linking on to the Cape Town branch. It turned out that Feri, as they came to call him, had in his possession a family photograph from the early fifties. Eli directed him to the old photographs on his extensive web home page, where he found the very same photo - "Jerry Zinn's barmitzvah."

Says Eli, "The rest is history. In a matter of days, some 73 years after Socher Zeldin left Riga, we linked up with two branches of my grandfather's family."

Socher himself was a very prominent personage in Cape Town in earlier days. He was the first exclusive manufacturing jeweller for American Swiss in the '30s and '40s - and responsible for training a number of young Jewish fellows who went on to become well established in the jewellery trade. He



Cousin Feri, from Budapest, seated with his Cousin Anne Zinn from Cape Town, with Cousin Sonia Bloch from Cape Town and Jill Rabinowitz, wife of Cousin Eli from Perth.

was also well known as a driving force, together with Mr Kellner and Mr Slivkin, in establishing the Chassidische Shul, first in Virginia Avenue Vredehoek, and later in Arthur's Road Sea Point.

His great nephew, Ferenc's story is also pretty interesting, for the grandson of a Latvian Jew. He is a retired Hungarian MP and President of

a human rights organisation, the Hungarian Helsinki Committee - hence his attendance at the Durban Conference.

Plans were immediately put into place for Feri to come to Cape Town before Durban, to meet his cousins. After a brief stayover in Johannesburg, he duly arrived to be warmly welcomed in three family gatherings, including a special shabbat at Phyllis Jowell's home, meeting all of his Cape Town kin. He had a wonderful time, reports Solly Berger, with whom he stayed. So much so that he actually postponed his flight to Durban.

As Solly explains, cut off from family and Yiddishkeit for some 70 years, Feri was overwhelmed by what he found in Cape Town. Apart from the family reconnection, he visited the Jewish Museum and the Holocaust Centre and enjoyed a shabbat service at the Gardens Shul.

"He just couldn't believe what he saw," says Solly.

The Jewish community of Hungary is apparently very much fragmented, and has no organised communal structure. Feri happened to be in Cape Town during the 160th anniversary celebrations of the Jewish community and, in fact, on the evening that Solly himself presented a special lecture on the community's history together with Prof Howard Phillips of UCT History Department.

"Because of his lack of connection with Jewish life - he's also married to a non-Jew - it was a revelation for Feri - almost a revival. He admitted this himself," says Solly.

And after four wonderful days in Cape Town, he went on to the Durban conference, which offered a very different set of scenarios!

Had it not been for that conference, however, this reunion of family separated over some five decades and three distant continents, would never have come about. Such is fate.

Saul Issroff's London-based website [www.jewishgen.org](http://www.jewishgen.org)



The family picture - Jerry Zinn's barmitzvah in 1953 at the Temple Israel Hall in Green Point.

*Paul and May Arieli  
of the Goldschmidt  
Family Trust*

**Additionally, Ferenc, known as Feri, introduced me to additional Zeldin family, living in Istanbul: My grandfather Socher Zeldin, had another sister, Masha who, with her Hungarian husband Sandor, moved to Turkey in the early 1920s. Although they were no longer alive, their daughter and their grandchildren (my second cousins) were in Istanbul.**

**There was also a second cousin in Washington DC and other Zeldin family, the Bock family, in Dallas. I started corresponding with them.**

**I made my first trip to the Baltics, Central and Eastern Europe in May 2011, starting in Riga, where I had commissioned research by Rita Bogdanova, archivist at the Latvian State Archives.**



**With Rita Bogdanova and Saul Issroff in Israel July 2015**

**Rita found pre WWII material on the Zeldin family in Riga and Dvinsk, known today as Daugavpils.**

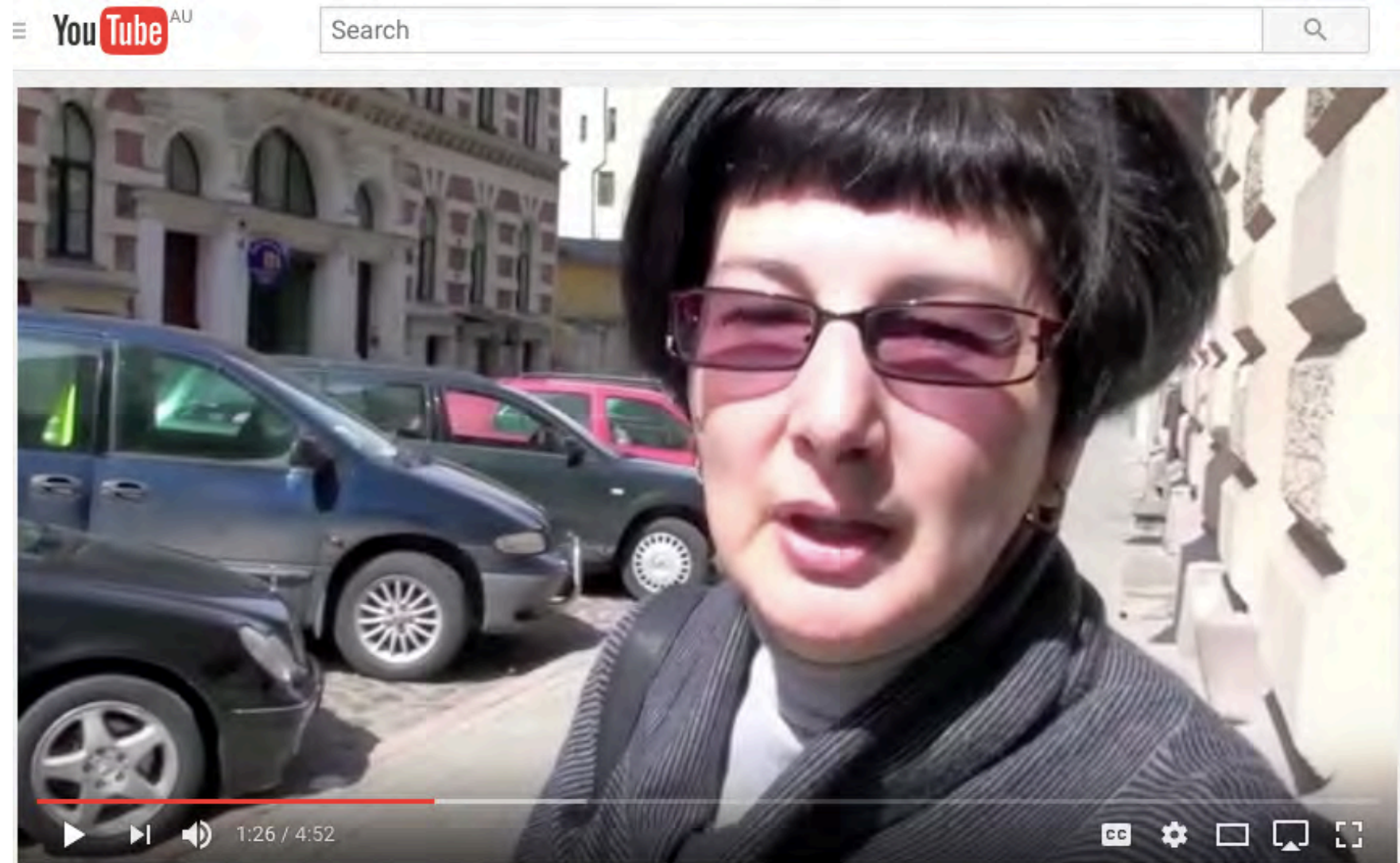




Rachel (Rael) Zeldin's passport document.

Using this research as my foundation, I was able to visit family addresses with my guide, Elena Spungina.

Video: <https://youtu.be/xml5HgpBe-8>



Just after leaving Riga, I received the 1960 diary of my late cousin Phyllis Jowell. In it she wrote about meeting our uncle David Zeldin, his wife Esther and children, Mendel and Zara.



The cover of Phyllis's diary and photos she had pasted in it:



**Rivka & Mendel Zeldin, my cousin, with their son Alex**  
**In the diary he was referred to as Mishka, and his wife and son's names weren't given.**





**Zara with daughter, Mira**

**In the diary, she was referred to as Sofka and her daughter's name wasn't given.**

**After visiting Latvia, Lithuania and Poland in May 2011, I arrived in Budapest, Hungary and met my second cousin Feri Koszeg for first time, since connecting in 2001.**

**Other family members joined the party, including Feri's family, Fanni and her husband David Waitz from New York, Sarah, her husband Peter Magyari, and her brother Aron; my son Neil from Oxford; my nephew Ronen Katz and his daughter Shachar from Israel. Visiting Budapest from Istanbul was our mutual second cousin Mehmet Imre and his wife Billur.**



**It was a most memorable evening with the three Zeldin second cousins, all grandchildren of three Zeldin siblings from Dvinsk, Latvia.**



With Feri and the photos that helped bring our families together. The three second cousins: Mehmet, Feri & Eli.



Feri with a famous photo of himself running from Soviet agents.



If you are interested in the background story of this famous photo, go to the 6 minute mark of this video filmed at the Library Of Congress Washington DC in 2014.

<https://youtu.be/LKeTbuiHqNM>



The image shows a YouTube video player interface. At the top left is the YouTube logo with 'AU' next to it. To its right is a search bar with the word 'Search' inside. The main video area displays a black and white historical photograph of a man in a suit running across a street, carrying a briefcase. In the background, other men in suits are walking, and a building with a sign that says 'TUZOLTO' is visible. A small inset video in the bottom left corner shows a man in a dark suit speaking at a podium, with a timer showing '5:08'. The main video player has a progress bar at the bottom showing '6:24 / 1:01:48' and various control icons like play, volume, and full screen. Below the video player, the title 'Samizdat - Civil Disobedience & the Helsinki Process' is displayed, followed by the 'LibraryOfCongress' channel name and logo.



I continued my journey to Istanbul where I met Mehmet's brother Ahmet Imre and his wife, Pinar.

In 2013, I returned to Istanbul, where I met two more of my second cousins, Haluk Atasoy and his wife Sena, and Cihad Atasoy and his wife Seda. These men are second cousins of mine and all have the same Jewish Hungaria grandfather and their grandmother Masha, was my grandfather Isocher Zeldin's sister.



L-R Back: Haluk, Cihad, Ahmet, Mehmet & Eli. Front: Sena, Seda, Pinar & Billur

In the past few years, having found this expanded family, the question of Zara (known to us as Sofka) came up, but no one really knew where to find her nor most importantly, did anyone remember her surname.

I had tried looking for Zeldins on Facebook, but had no luck.

**Then in June this year I wrote to the Latvian Archives again, but this time to the section of the archives that deal with post WWII and the Soviet era. My friend Rita had suggested I contact the Personnel Archives which has files of families living abroad.**

**The Archives replied that they had found such documents of the Zeldin family.**



**On 22 September 2016, our postie delivered a registered letter from the Latvian Archives.**



Included were Zara's and her daughter Alla Khelem's 1973 joint Soviet passport.



I asked Avigdor Shligel, my Ukrainian friend, to translate Zara's surname which was written in Russian / Cyrillic.

СМУШКОВИЧ Мееру Абрамовичу,  
СМУШКОВИЧ Заре Давыдовне,  
с дочерьми: Аллой,  
Мирой,  
ЗЕЛЬДИНОЙ Эсфире Зальмановне

The answer and the key was: **SMUSHKOVICH**



**I posted the following on Facebook and JewishGen:**



**Eli Rabinowitz** added 4 new photos.

22 September at 09:47 · Perth · 🌐 📌

ATTENTION: I am looking for my cousin Zara SMUSHKOVICH, husband Meir, their daughters Ala and Mira. I believe they moved to Canada from Israel in the 70s. They were originally from Latvia. Zara would be in her late 70s and her daughter in their 50s. Here are Zara and Ala in their Soviet passport from 1973 and a photo from Israel, also in the 70s. Please contact me if you think you know them



ИЧ Мееру Абрам  
ИЧ Заре Давыдо  
ОЪМИ: Аллой,  
Мирой,  
НОЙ Эсфире Зал



**Eli Rabinowitz**

22 September 2016 at 11:12 AM



To: <jewishgen@lyris.jewishgen.org> recipientssdyddFS  
Looking for my cousin Zara SMUSHKOVICH

Hi All

I am looking for my first cousin Zara SMUSHKOVICH and her family from Latvia.  
Zara moved to Israel in 1973 and then moved to Canada a few years later.

Zara SMUSHKOVICH born 1938  
Her husband is Meir ben Avraham SMUSHKOVICH b 1931  
Daughter - Mira SMUSHKOVICH b 1958  
Daughter - Ala SMUSHKOVICH b 1964  
Zara's mother is Esphir ZELDINA born 1912

The Facebook post for this is:  
<https://www.facebook.com/elirab1/posts/10154421922401070>  
where you can see their photos.

If you know where they are or have come across them, please reply to [eli@elirab.com](mailto:eli@elirab.com)

Thanks

Eli Rabinowitz  
Perth, Australia

**Within an hour** a Facebook member, Elena Shapiro Wayne, sent me the Geni page of the late husband of Zara - Meir Smushkovich. I then looked up the names on that Geni tree on Facebook, including Alon Gold, who, according to Geni, was Zara's grandson.

## Meir Smushkovich

+ Follow

Actions ▾

Meir Smushkovich is your first cousin's late husband.

You → Rachel Ray Rabinowitz  
your mother → David Zeldin  
her brother → Zara Shmushkovich (Zeldin)  
his daughter → Meir Smushkovich  
her husband

[share this path](#)



### Meir Smushkovich

Gender: Male  
Birth: June 26, 1931  
Riga, Latvia  
Death: December 29, 2007 (76)  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada  
Place of Burial: Toronto, ON, Canada  
Immediate Family: Son of [Yitzhak Smushkovich](#) and [Mira Smushkovich](#)  
Husband of [Zara Shmushkovich \(Zeldin\)](#)  
Father of [Mira Gold \(Shmushkovich\)](#) and [Alla Khelem \(Shmushkovich\)](#)  
Brother of [Zlata Smushkovits](#) and [Lea Smushkovits](#)  
Added by: [Alon Gold](#) on October 27, 2009  
Managed by: [Alon Gold](#)

 0 Matches  

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Overview

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DNA **NEW**

**Gert Rogers, from Toronto, saw my post on JewishGen, sent me an email with Zara's telephone number, which she had looked up in the telephone directory and then called to check that it was Zara.**

**“There is a listing in North York (Just north of Toronto (suburb) I can phone that number if you want. This is a landline, there may be other numbers.they would be cell numbers and they are not listed”**

**Gert Solnik Rogers - Toronto**



**I spoke to my first cousin Zara in Toronto that night. What an amazing experience to make this call! We were both ecstatic to make this connection! Zara was so happy to be in contact again with her 13 surviving Zeldin first cousins after more than 35 years.**

**Zara told me that Alon called to tell her that he had been contacted by a "stranger" on Facebook with informatio about his Zeldin family. As I was unknown to him, he needed to clear it with her as it had come out of nowhere.**





I called Alon Gold the following morning and we spoke for two hours. Like me, he is the go-to person in his family when it comes to maintaining family records and ties.



**Mendel Zeldin with his children Bella and Alex**

**Sadly, Zara's brother Mendel, passed away less than two months ago on 28 July 2016 in Brooklyn, NY. He was 8' We never met him. Only our late cousin, Phyllis Jowell, met him in 1960 in Riga.**



**L-R: Bella, Mendels daughter; Alla. his niece; Mendel, Mira, his niece; Angela, his great niece.**



**Zara with her daughters Alla and Mira.**

Here are photos of our "new" family.



Lucy's wedding in NY in 2010



Angela's wedding in Toronto in 2015



**Our new family's tree!**

**Once I received that registered letter from the archives in Riga, I knew that things would develop quickly.**

**My thanks go out to my friend Rita Bogdanova at the Latvian State Archives, Avigdor Shligel, Elena Shapiro Wayne and Gert Rogers.**

**Thanks to Jewishgen.org and Geni.com, it took less than an hour to find Alon Gold and his "baba Sofa", Zara Smushkovich, my long lost cousin!**

**There is so much history still to share. We are so looking forward to it.**

**A rip roaring success story, if ever there was one!**

**Thanks to my daughter in law Tami for calling me "tangential". You are right! Just what my sons, the doctors, ordered!**

**Chag Sameach 5777.**



From



**Elena Shapiro Wayne**

**3 October at 01:14** ·

As many of you know I have been extremely immersed in the Genealogy of my family and Gary's. I have been active in the genealogy community on Facebook. I had the pleasure of stumbling on a request from a very nice man in Australia looking for family members. I was able to very quickly find a record for one of his ancestors which helped him reconnect after decades! Today on the Jewish NEW YEAR I received a note at this link. At the end of this very wonderful family history I was honored to be mentioned. What a wonderful gift on Rosh Hashana! Eli Rabinowitz here is wishing many years of happiness with your newly found family. I am humbled to have been a small part of this wonderful Mitzvah.

L'Shana Tova.

Please check out this link to hear his story!

<http://elirab.me/finding-my-cousin-zara-smushkovich/>

From Gert Rogers, Toronto

2 October 2016

Dear Eli

I am so glad that I could help you. Your blog was amazing. I wrote Bubble Segal many years ago and she answered me so I know her by correspondence. Again I am happy for you.

Wishing you and **all** your family a Healthy and Happy New Year.

Gert

Gert Rogers - Toronto - Searching Goldman Woda Sziiakovich from Mordy, Losice, and Miedzyrzec Podlaski and Solnik Djtelbaum from Staszow all in Poland