

The Holocaust Before The Holocaust
By Jody Gorran

2019 marks the 100th anniversary of the forgotten 1919 pogroms in the Ukraine. Some refer to this series of pogroms from 1917-1921 as “The Holocaust Before The Holocaust” and as “genocide” itself. The year 1919 was unfortunately very different as the character of the pogroms changed for the worst, particularly for Jewish women. I’m attempting to provide a voice for these forgotten women who suffered so greatly simply for being Jewish. I want the world to know what happened to them. I’m working with others in an attempt to see a feature film produced based on our screenplay “*Pogrom*” and inspired by the historical record so that these women will finally have a voice and never be forgotten.

I began this journey in late December 2017 when I received an email from Avraham Groll, Director of JewishGen.org, the Jewish genealogical research site, thanking me for having responded to their year-end email solicitation and having contributed \$100 or more. As a “perk” for having contributed, JewishGen provided me with online access to see a new film documentary entitled “*My Dear Children*”. Amongst other things, it was described as the first documentary about the pogroms. I knew nothing about these pogroms. I found the film so compelling that in early January 2018, I contacted the producer of the film, LeeAnn Dance, and purchased a license so that I could show the film in my community in southern Florida.

Little did I know what would follow?

For twenty years, I thought I knew the name and location of my father’s father’s ancestral village in the Ukraine until late January 2018, when I learned that I had been wrong. Not only had I been wrong, but twenty years ago I had even paid a Ukrainian to visit what I thought was “the village”. I would never have learned the truth without the intimate knowledge of volunteer members of JewishGen.

Based upon the original JewishGen “shtetl finder” from twenty years ago and the current Jewish Gazetteer on JewishGen and using their Daitch-Mokotoff Soundex, I had put in what our family said was “the town” which was described as “Chaswater” near Odessa and had received back, both twenty years ago and today, the town of “Kosy Vytorye” near Kosy Slobidka. However, there was neither interest in this town on JewishGen Family Finder nor any particular historical Jewish presence mentioned for this place.

In asking for assistance from JewishGen, I received a surprising response from both Alexander Sharon and Warren Blatt that my original “Chaswater” near Odessa was still near Odessa, but was actually another town known as Khashchuvatye.

I asked both of them how they knew this when the JewishGen “tools” said otherwise. Both of them basically said “we just knew”. Warren Blatt explained that he was the

creator of the JewishGen Communities Database and familiar with most Jewish Communities in Eastern Europe.

Khashchuvatye/Khashevata had about two-dozen people on JewishGen Family Finder who were interested in this town as well as having a Google group. I started looking at everything, and contacting them about the town as I was so excited by this new discovery. Khashchuvatye had the Jewish presence I had hoped that the ancestral village would have had.

Now earlier on, I had done DNA testing through Family Tree DNA and figured that it would not hurt if I ran the twenty or so names of these people who I now knew believed they had family connections to Khashchuvatye against my DNA match list.

Lo and behold, I found two distant matches out of twenty. While we do not “know” of any family names in common, this DNA match appears to provide additional evidence that Khashchuvatye or its vicinity was really “the place”, particularly when you can tie family connections to a specific location AND have DNA matches related to that location as well.

I also learned from the Google group that unfortunately, like thousands of other shtetls, its Jewish population suffered the fate of both twentieth century pogroms and the Holocaust. The subject of pogroms caught my attention because until viewing *My Dear Children*, I had no real knowledge whatsoever of the pogroms. And now I was reading that Khashchuvatye had been subjected to these pogroms. A June 1923 report from the American Joint Distribution Committee posted in the Google group described the following:

“Khashevata is one of the points of Gaisin District, which have suffered most from pogroms. The bands of Volynetz and Tiutunik rivaled with small local bands and the town was constantly pillaged during three years. There were some cases when the Jewish youths offered resistance to the bands.

The most cruel pogrom was committed by Denikin’s troops who remained in Khashevata for about 3 months, pillaging the population, carrying away whole carts loaded with the belongings of Jews and violating the women: many of the latter became infected with syphilis. Finally, on the day of retreat of Denikin's Army, the officers committed a massacre in which 125 persons were murdered and 55 persons were wounded (in some cases, arms were chopped off.)”

To have first seen the documentary, *My Dear Children*, which highlighted these post Russian revolution pogroms, and then after twenty years of thinking that the ancestral village of my grandfather was elsewhere, to then finally learn its true name was Khashevata and it had been the object of just such pogroms, left me speechless.

So after bringing *My Dear Children* for a showing in my community and seeing how moved the audience had been, I was determined to learn more about these pogroms in Ukraine. As part of this documentary, a portion was devoted to Dr Irina Astashkevich, whose 2013 doctoral dissertation was entitled *The Pogroms in Ukraine in 1917-1920: an Alternate Universe*.

I obtained a copy of her dissertation and was further shocked by what it described. I reached out and spoke with her about her research and she explained that she had written a book on this subject and that it would be published in the fall. I followed this with a three-day visit in June 2018 to the Yivo Institute for Jewish Research in Manhattan, which was also prominently featured in the film and where much of Dr Astashkevich's research work was done.

My goal was to find more information on Khashchuvatye/Khashevata and the pogroms of that period. I was able to find a 1928 report by N. Gergel in which I learned that Khashchevata, was subjected to twelve successive pogroms during this period, the second highest number out of 531 Ukrainian villages subjected to 1286 pogroms.

Later that fall, Dr Astashkevich's book, entitled *Gendered Violence: Jewish Women in the Pogroms of 1917-1921* was published and I obtained a copy. It was described by its publisher as a groundbreaking study of an important and neglected topic—the systematic use of rape as a strategic weapon of the genocidal anti-Jewish violence, known collectively as pogroms, that erupted in Ukraine in the period between 1917 and 1921, and in which at least 100,000 Jews died and undocumented numbers of Jewish women were raped. The book is based on the in-depth study of the scores of narratives of Jewish men and women who survived the pogrom violence, but were then all but forgotten for almost a century. This book deconstructs the motives of perpetrators, the experience and expression of trauma by the victimized community, and how the genocidal objectives of the pogrom perpetrators were achieved and maximized through the macabre carnival of violence.

So now here I am, wanting to share with you a film project based on a series of historical events of unspeakable violence perpetrated against a population of Jewish women in Europe who were subjected to mass public gang rape, mutilation, and murder that has been virtually untold and unspoken of for the past one hundred years. The fate of women in these circumstances has often been neglected.

As part of my plan to bring this horrendous series of events to the public's attention, I was able to come up with the outline of a story and secured screenwriter Glenn A. Bruce www.imdb.com/name/nm0115486 with whom I had worked successfully before, to craft a screenplay entitled *Pogrom*.

I believe that this is a subject that should be known and never be forgotten. And what better way to achieve this than through a feature film. *Pogrom* (tagline: Some Things are Worse Than Death) When a young Jewish US Army veteran of WW1, who

previously emigrated to the U.S. with his father, returns to his family's ancestral village in Ukraine, he tries to save his loved ones from the continuous series of mass public gang rapes, mutilations, and murders during the horrifying pogroms post Russian revolution, but his best intentions are not nearly enough to accomplish this goal.

We are hoping to gain the attention of the film industry and find a production company interested in making this film. It's *Saving Private Ryan* meets *Schindler's List* in Ukraine.

So if you happen to know anyone with any connections to the film industry, please give them a copy of this article and/or let them know that I'd be pleased to send them a pdf copy of the script for *Pogrom* as well as a pdf copy of the book *Gendered Violence: Jewish Women in the Pogroms of 1917-1921*. My email address is jgorran11@gmail.com