

# Voices

A FAMILY HISTORY  
of  
*The immigrant generation*

by

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(AKA Ferdman)



**THE CATTLE DEALER CHAGALL 1912**



In the early 40s the family gathered each summer in a rambling white brick and wooden house that overlooked Lake Michigan. The steps to the beach were covered with sand, the house always needed paint, and the old dwelling was a warren: every porch had been turned into a bedroom; hideabeds lined the living room walls.

The big lake is a seemingly unending body of water. Like the ocean it stretches beyond the horizon. Seafaring ships sail from port to port. The beaches are sandy and the surf is not unlike that of the Atlantic. My days were spent attacking and riding waves; chewing gritty sandwiches, and watching the older, shirtless, yarmulke'd religious cousins play basketball on the broad cement patio/basket ball court that overlooked the water.

Back then we were a clan, a tribe of sorts. The men and most of the women had Eastern European H' accents and often communicated in Yiddish. One summer the women even tried cooking and eating together. That apparently didn't work well, and within a few years the basement had 4 small kitchens; the large eating room had 4 sets of tables and chairs, each belonging mainly to one family.

We were descendents of a man and woman from a little town in the Ukraine. Our nuclear family had over the decades been extricated, herded, and teased out of that hostile land and had been replanted in Illinois. In the late 1930s as war clouds started gathering over the homeland, my uncles managed to extract their mother, a sister, another sister and her family.

Then it was September 1939. The world was at war. And those who remained were trapped.



I suspect (as we gathered in South Haven during those war years) that the brothers breathed a sigh of relief, accomplishment, and perhaps exhilaration. But I have this childhood

vision of my father sitting in a darkened room; chin on palm, looking worried. I'm sure he and the others felt sadness, a dread, a fear for those left behind.



Mainly as a result of South Haven I knew the older generation and sensed their beings and their personalities. And when my brother Ted decided I should be the family member who interviewed the uncles and aunts, I accepted the assignment. (Ted interviewed Uncle Dave on tape in the mid 70s. He made the mistake of letting Uncle Dave listen to a playback of the tape. Upon hearing it Uncle Dave had sober second thoughts about some of his controversial comments, and he made Ted erase them. That soured Ted on the project and he passed it on.)



Most of the interviews occurred during Passover week. My mother and father gathered their offspring in St. Louis for the holiday, and on many of the visits I managed to spend a day with an uncle here, an aunt there. I asked about the old country, and recorded their recollections. I typed up the interviews and put the conversations into a book. In 1982 my father, Manuel, made it available to the family and others. Over time I collected more stories. I had a tearful visit with a landsman who survived the scheetah in Torczyn. Sheindel in Israel shared here story.

Life went on. The older generation started dying off. There was another rift in the Fredman family. I turned 70 and realized I had interviewed the uncles and aunts while they were in their 70s. It was time for an updated version. As Marion, my wife, pointed out, the stories would now be preserved for future generations, for those who didn't know Baba, Uncle Dave, Uncle Harry. But for the future generations the book needed maps, family trees, and pictures. The stories seemed endless.

My wife Marion's family were German Jews. They were immigrants but their European and early American experiences were different from those of my parents.. The title page shows our trek to Wesensee Cemetery in Berlin to visit the grave of her grandmother, Fredricka. Marion's family story is Part II of this "book."

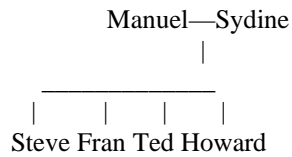


(My wife, Marion, was born in Holland to German Jews hidden by the underground. My wife's family, German Jews, escaped from Western Germany.  
THEIR STORY STARTS WITH MARION CHAPTER 50

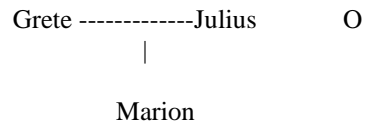
**BACK TO THE FERDMANS WHO LATER BECAME THE FREDMANS**

We are a big family. Lots of branches and names.

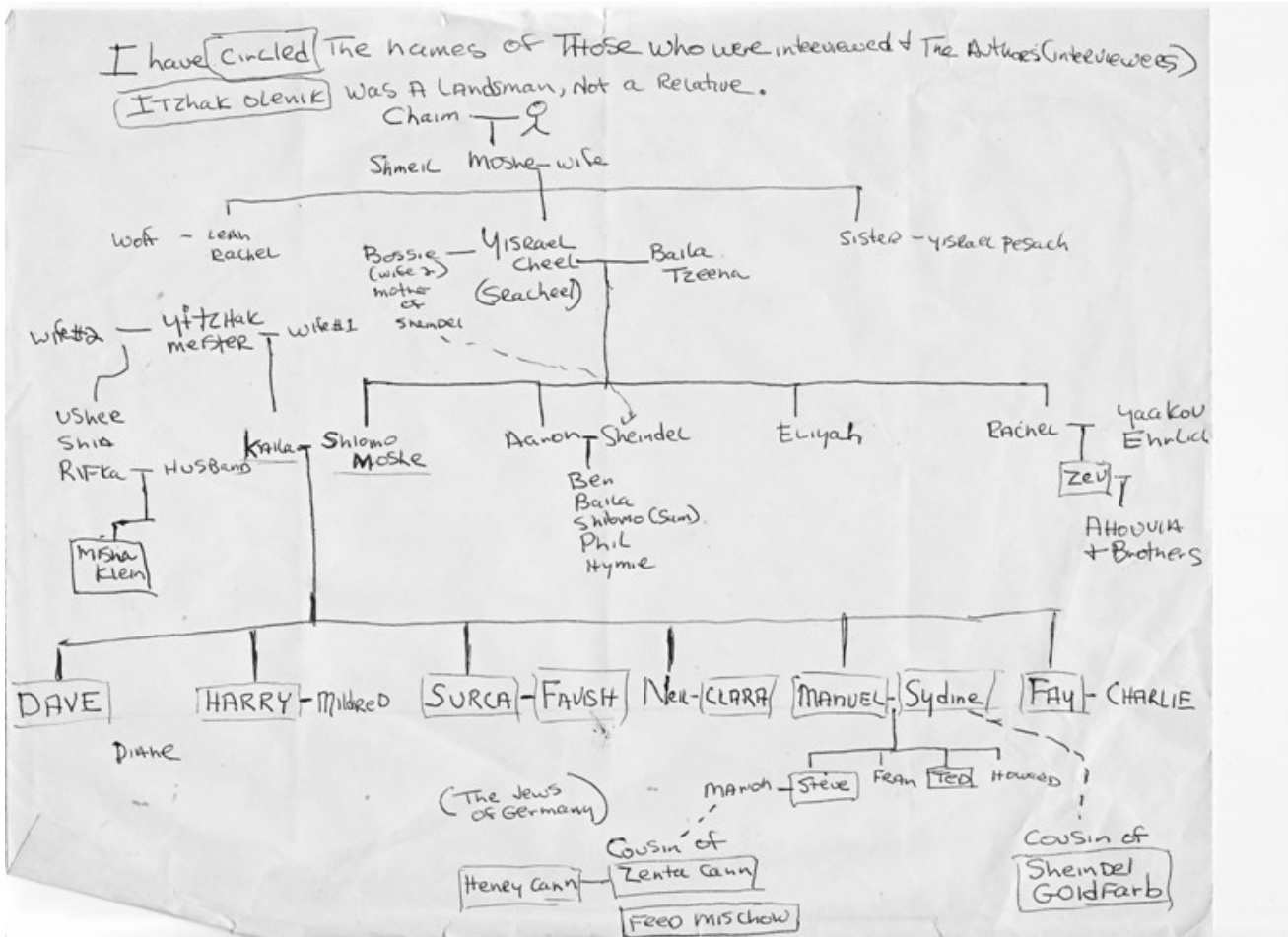
**POLISH JEWS**



**GERMAN JEWS**



The Fredman/Ferdmans are a big family. Lots of branches and names.



When I started drawing family trees gaps started appearing.  
 What do we know about Uncle Aaron's family? What about Dave's first wife Goldie Allen? There were people to talk to.